

# After the Election: Fundamental Security Challenges Nigeria Must Face

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# **After the Election: Fundamental Security Challenges Nigeria Must Face**

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# Nigeria's New Beginning

After a hard-fought and competitive election, Muhammadu Buhari has become Nigeria's 4th democratically elected president. Observers from around the world have commended Nigeria for the smooth transition between rival political parties. Nigerians, neighboring countries, and international actors alike are now expectantly watching to see how Nigeria manages the many challenges facing Africa's most populous country and largest economy.

Key among these is security. Nigeria has increasingly been in the global spotlight in recent years because of the rise in attacks by Boko Haram, the violent extremist group. This has resulted in the deaths of over 10,000 people since 2014. Less recognized is that Boko Haram is but one of a series of interlocking security and governance challenges that the new government in Nigeria will face. This compilation reviews some of the most pressing of these fundamental challenges and the leadership that will be required to address them.

\* \* \*

## 1. Identity

Since Nigeria's independence in 1960, strong ethno-religious identities have prevented a truly [pan-Nigerian identity](#) from developing. Politically, Nigeria is a federation of 36 states. Ethnically, it is home to 250 different groups, though the 3 largest ethnicities—Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo—account for about 68 percent of the population. Religiously, Nigeria is divided along its so-called “Middle Belt” between the mostly Muslim North and the majority Christian South. Additionally, local laws sanctioned by the national constitution further divide citizens into [“indigenes”](#) and [“settlers”](#) within each locality. Indigenes (“sons of the soil”) enjoy rights denied to settlers (even those whose families' residence go back generations). These rights include the ability to own land and access to education, politics, and government employment.

How people choose to identify themselves is not necessarily problematic scholar Francis Deng has observed, but to manage a pluralistic identity, a government should create a national framework with which all can [identify without any distinction based on ethnicity, tribe, or reli-](#)



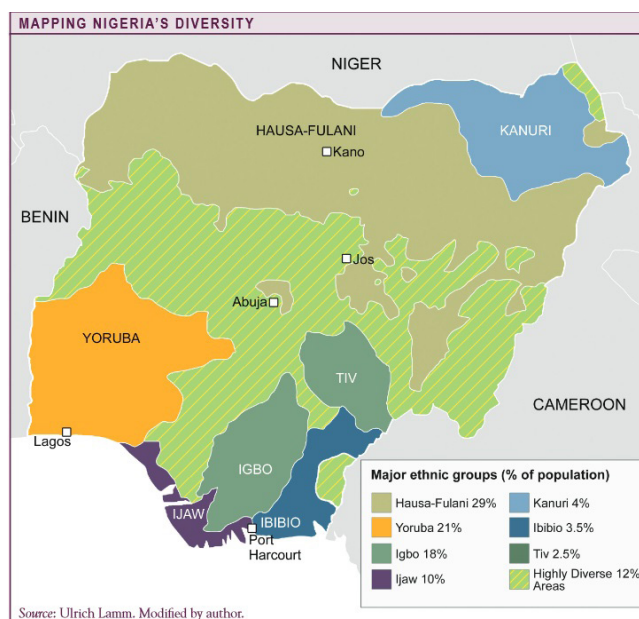
[gion](#). With most Nigerians deriving their sense of belonging from an ethno-religious perspective or from an assigned affiliation as an indigene or settler, Nigerians' lack of common citizenship reinforces [polarities in ethnic, religious, regional, and legal status](#). And without a shared identity or meaningful engagement in one another's lives, neighbors find it easier to respond to [perceived differences to devalue one another](#). In Nigeria, identity conflicts mask deeper systemic issues [at the center of which is the relationship between political power and access to economic resources and opportunities](#). Ethnic thinking and mobilization emerge from this struggle for power, wealth, and resources, notes [Clement Mweyang Aapengnuo](#), not from an intrinsic hatred.

## Why have Nigeria's leaders not succeeded in building a truly Nigerian nation?

Since 1979, Nigeria has been governed through a power-sharing arrangement mandated by its constitution that requires equal representation in key political and bureaucratic positions among its diverse communities [“to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity.”](#) Over time, however, this has transformed into a patronage system of governance—a pacifying system of distribution and allocation. Rather than promoting a sense of belonging and equality, this political patronage, often based on ethno-religious factors, has [contributed to marginalization and corruption](#), which has created integrity and legitimacy problems for the government.

[Chris Kwaja](#) explains that political patronage, long entrenched in Nigerian politics, “provides an institutionalized incentive for political opportunists to build power on the basis of exclusion.” Many of the practices associated with it, such as the fraudulent issuance of indigene certificates by politicians, “undermine the democratic form of government that Nigeria aspires to uphold and undercut the very notion of what it means to be Nigerian.” This explains why, for instance, [religious leaders command more loyalty than the central government in Abuja.](#)

Reflecting on the challenges the government faces in the wake of security crises in the Northeast, along the Middle Belt, in the Niger Delta region, and in the Gulf of Guinea, longtime Nigeria scholar John Paden points to the government’s inability to provide an effective system of equitable distribution, [manage ethno-religious relations](#), uphold accountable governance, and exercise the responsibility to protect its population. Deng cautions that peace and stability will elude a pluralistic state until it develops norms and means for managing diversity within a framework of unity. Nigeria’s viability as a nation-state depends upon this. This will entail measures that directly [mitigate violence as well as realize constitutional reform](#) to address



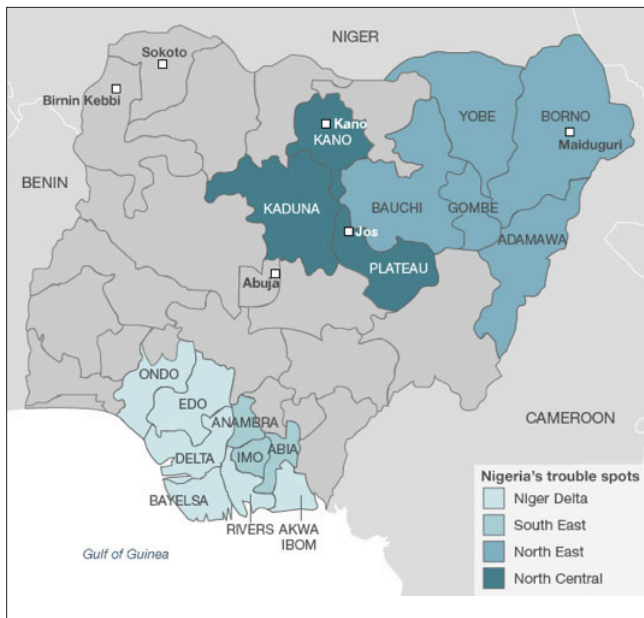
perceptions of marginalization. Unfortunately, advancing such a vision has not been part of the electoral discourse.

## 2. Faultlines

Nigeria’s most talked about faultline is the economic and social imbalance between the relatively underdeveloped, historically marginalized and mainly Muslim North, and the wealthier, more industrialized and predominantly Christian South. Nigeria’s northern states account for roughly 66 percent of the country’s poor—a disparity that is seen to be growing worse. At the local level this faultline is most exposed in the country’s Middle Belt, particularly the states of Plateau and Kaduna where Hausa-Fulani Muslims and Yoruba-Igbo Christians are evenly divided. The region has experienced interreligious violence resulting in the loss of at least 7,000 lives in interreligious violence since 2001.

Other faultlines exist outside this larger narrative. Nigerian activist Tolu Ogunlesi explains that in the predominantly Christian Southeast “lingering resentment among many Protestants about the [perceived dominance of Roman Catholics](#) are widespread.” Similarly, in the Northeast, violence between Sufi, Sunni, and Shiite orders and societies occurs with frequency. Underlying these sectarian conflicts are deep socio-





**Nigeria's Trouble Spots**

Source: Temi Kogbe

economic inequalities. The [conflict in the Niger Delta](#), located in the far south of the country, explains some of these complexities. The largest militant group there, the Movement for the Liberation of the Niger Delta, or MEND, claims that it is fighting to ensure that oil proceeds from the region are returned to the area's residents and to secure reparations from the federal government for environmental pollution caused by this industry. While violence in the Niger Delta has subsided in recent years, prior to the election MEND had indicated that it would resume its campaign should Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner, come to power. Nigeria's multiple faultlines, in short, defy simplistic explanations.

### **How are Nigeria's faultlines exploited in the political process?**

While the "North-South, Muslim-Christian" dichotomies mask a much more nuanced conflict picture, they are by far the most invoked by the country's top politicians [giving them more resonance at the national level](#) according to former U.S. Ambassador and Africa scholar John Campbell. These differences are used by political leaders in the fierce [competition for public office](#) and control over resources that can support the extensive patronage networks

that have dominated Nigerian politics. It is believed that Boko Haram was initially supported and protected by local politicians to gain greater leverage in this political maneuvering but the [insurgency eventually turned on the politicians](#) and grew into a terrorist movement that no one appears capable of controlling.

The declaration of a state of emergency in the northeastern states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa by President Goodluck Jonathan in December 2013 led to the deployment of thousands of federal troops in the region. In the process of combatting Boko Haram, these troops were widely alleged to have committed [human rights violations against innocent civilian populations in the North](#). As a result, many northerners feel they are under occupation by a foreign entity.

An examination of these faultlines illustrates that ethnicity and religion are not the driving force behind Nigeria's conflicts but rather narratives politicized to mobilize support for economic, regional, and political goals. [Clement Mweyang Aapengnuo observes](#), "People do not kill each other because of ethnic differences; they kill each other when these differences are promoted as the barrier to advancement and opportunity."

Failure of ethical leadership is largely to blame for this state of affairs [according to celebrated Nigerian writer and Nobel laureate, Wole Soyinka](#). In the absence of such leadership, dominant and harmful narratives have become embedded in the political process. Accordingly, for many northern politicians control of the presidency is the only viable means of "catching up" with the more developed and affluent South. Many southern politicians, for their part, point to the fact that [most Nigerian military rulers since independence have been northern Muslims](#). The North must accordingly "be kept in check." These two dominant narratives are relevant to understanding the faultline dynamics that heighten the risk of conflict in Nigeria.

## What attempts have been made to heal these divides?

With the restoration of civilian rule and Nigeria's turn toward democracy in 1999, northern and southern political elites of the People's Democratic Party attempted to resolve their zero sum approaches to politics through political power sharing. They reached a "gentleman's agreement" to rotate the presidency between the North and South. Under the arrangement, Olusegun Obasanjo, a southerner, ruled from 1999 to 2007. In keeping with the arrangement, Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, a northerner, took over from Obasanjo but died in office in 2010. Goodluck Jonathan, then Vice President and a Christian from the South, assumed leadership and secured his party's nomination to contest the 2011 presidential elections which he won. Embittered, many northern elites accused him of breaking the accord, in particular marginalizing their region which they say has held political power for only 3 of the last 15 years thanks to "[manipulation by southerners.](#)" These grievances might ease given Buhari's victory but resolving the long-running suspicion between northern and southern populations will require the concerted attention of political leaders.



Source: Sabrina Dan Photo (Flicker)

Besides political power-sharing, Nigeria has experimented with institutional and legal measures to alleviate concerns by minorities about

their exclusion from the political process and complaints about lack of service delivery on the basis of ethnicity and religion. However, even these have been met with mixed success. A case in point is the [Federal Character Commission](#), a statutory body established in 1996 to provide affirmative action and promote equity in public appointments. The commission authorized local officials to issue so-called "indigene certificates," a practice recognized by Nigeria's constitution. Under this system, residents who are indigenous to a particular area enjoy rights denied to those who are not.

These rights include the ability to own land and access to education and government employment. Possession of the indigene certificate

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*"ethnicity and religion are not the driving force behind Nigeria's conflicts but rather narratives politicized to mobilize support for economic, regional, and political goals"*

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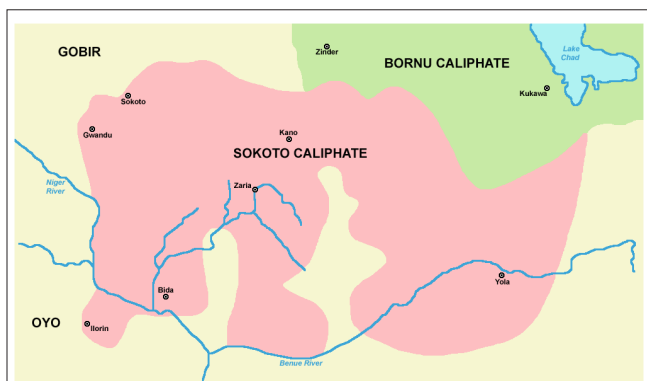
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is therefore a license to socioeconomic advancement and, consequently, highly sought after and prone to abuse. Since allocation of these certificates is at the discretion of local authorities, households may live in a jurisdiction for generations and still be deemed "settlers." Instead, local politicians have a strong incentive to use these highly coveted certificates as a tool to consolidate ethnic and religious majorities.

Consequently, minority communities across Nigeria's 36 states feel increasingly disenfranchised and aggrieved. At the heart of the issue, according to Chris Kwaja, is that Nigeria's systems of political power sharing and resource allocation further entrench the country's multiple faultlines. These will only be addressed with fundamental reforms.

### 3. Extremism

Extremist interpretations of Islam by marginalized communities in Nigeria have strong resonance as an avenue to address perceived injustices and economic inequalities. The dangers of extremism are especially pronounced in the Muslim-majority North, which is substantially underdeveloped relative to other parts of the country. The economic disparities alone are stark: 72 percent of northerners live in poverty, compared to 27 percent of southerners. The lack of confidence in government institutions combines with these realities to make communities across the North particularly susceptible to extremist messaging.



Sokoto Caliphate in the 19th Century  
Source: Panonian

This state of affairs has caused intense resentment of the political status quo and fueled extremist and rejectionist thinking that Boko Haram has tapped into effectively to recruit new members and build its power. The movement’s extremist narratives invoke real and perceived grievances, often linking the North’s plight to corruption in the “Christian government” and accusing the northern Muslim leadership of colluding with it. The narratives also portray the [corruption of Nigerian society as a function of Western influences](#), which are blamed for the North’s deprivation.

Boko Haram contends that the solution to Nigeria’s problems lie in the strict adherence to Islamic law. In the early years after its founding in 2002 the movement was largely nonviolent.

This changed in 2009 following a series of deadly clashes between its followers and security forces leading to over 800 deaths and the killing of its founder, Mohammed Yusuf. After going underground the group re-emerged in 2010. Its current leader, Abubakar Shekau, far more radical than Yusuf, has turned Boko Haram into one of the most brutal terrorist organizations in Africa, aligning it with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria, also known as ISIS.

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*“Boko Haram contends that the solution to Nigeria’s problems lie in the strict adherence to Islamic law”*

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The clashes in 2009 were not only a key turning point but also had historical precedents. In 1982, followers of another radical and charismatic Muslim cleric, [Mohammed Marwa](#) (known as Maitatsine, meaning “the one who damns”), clashed with authorities leaving 4,000 people dead in the northern city of Kano, including Maitatsine. However, this Muslim cleric’s movement, like Yusuf’s, lived on. [His followers rose up again](#) later that year, leading to 3,300 dead in long-running clashes with security forces and again in 1984 in Gongola, in the North, resulting in 1,000 deaths.

#### **Why are the historical and contemporary roots of Boko Haram relevant today?**

Northern Nigeria has a long history of Islamic government dating back to the Sayfawa Dynasty, which ruled the Kanem Bornu Empire from 1086 to 1846. Islamic governments were also established by the Borno Caliphate (1380–1893) and the Sokoto Caliphate (1804–1903). The three empires extended over most of northern and northeastern Nigeria, modern-day Burkina Faso, and Cameroon, Niger, western Sudan, and southern Libya. Most of Boko Haram’s recruits come from the Kanuri community, which ruled the Kanem Bornu Empire at its peak. The Kanuri language was also the official language of the more recent Borno Caliphate.

The Kanuri remain highly influential and have produced several national level political leaders in modern Nigeria.

Presently, this community of about 10 million, which still inhabits the lands of this former caliphate and mostly traces its origins to Kanem Bornu, feels politically and economically disenfranchised. Many of the Kanuri view these caliphates as a source of pride and an alternative governing framework from the current secular state, which is perceived as corrupt and incapable of serving the needs of the northern populations. Boko Haram has exploited this effectively. A key narrative in its propaganda emphasizes how much better off the Kanuri were under caliphate rule.

Boko Haram's declared caliphate in 2014 was an attempt to tap this sentiment—but with Takfiri ideology replacing the region's Sufi traditions, which Boko Haram considers un-Islamic. Takfiri practice permits declaring other Muslims non-believers and targeting them for death, explaining the killing of hundreds of Muslims by Boko Haram.

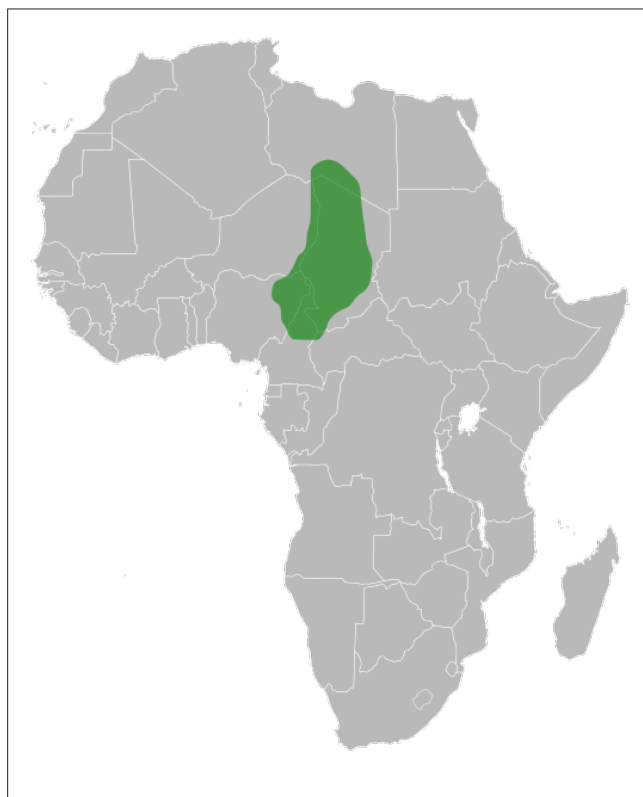
This differentiation reflects a key problem underlying the spread of extremism in Nigeria. Many Muslim communities have turned to religious institutions for redress to the growing marginalization they feel. However, over recent decades, the identity of what it means to be Muslim in Nigeria has shifted. Today, militant interpretations of Islam are much more prevalent. And the history of caliphate rule has provided a powerful reference point to advance this view. All of this creates an enabling environment for extremist ideologies to thrive.

In short, the underlying ideological appeal of violent, Islamist-based insurgencies in parts of northern Nigeria predates Boko Haram. Absent a comprehensive solution to the region's grievances, extremist ideologies will live on even after the group is defeated militarily.

## 4. Boko Haram

Boko Haram emerged in 2002 in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno State in Nigeria's north-east region. Initially organized as a sect under the leadership of Salafist scholar Mohammed Yusuf, the group, while critical of the government, was largely peaceful. [Drawing on a legacy of radical Islamist ideology](#), Yusuf promoted a more stringent adherence to Sharia Law in Nigeria's northern states. Only this, he argued, would deliver the largely Muslim northern states from the [longstanding grievances](#) they faced.

Under Yusuf's leadership, Boko Haram concentrated its energy on mobilizing protest against government neglect especially among unemployed Muslim youth. It also created a "state within a state" and among its many practices included "Hijra"—a call to individuals to sever their connections to the government and realize religious purity within predefined and isolated communities. Reflecting this strategy, Boko Haram had its own cabinet, religious po-



The Kanem Bornu Empire  
Source: Arnold Platon

lice, religious complex, school, and a large farm for food production. It also carried out “state-like” functions such as providing welfare, job training, and alternative education.

### **Why did Boko Haram turn from a nonviolent movement to an armed insurgency?**

As Boko Haram continued to grow, clashes with police became frequent and the federal government, which had long ignored it, began to take notice. The group became increasingly violent, so much so that by 2008 it had begun to store small arms in its central offices in Bauchi State and Maiduguri. There were also episodic attacks, drive-by shootings, and a refusal by Boko Haram members to obey local laws. The tipping point came in July 2009 when a violent encounter with police triggered 5 days of riots in Bauchi, later spreading to Borno, Yobe, and Kano States. These ended after Yusuf was captured and killed in police custody.



Abubakar Shekau delivering a speech at an undisclosed location  
Photo: Boko Haram via AFP

Boko Haram thereafter decidedly abandoned its self-ascribed proselytizing mission. It went underground, regrouped, and reemerged 18 months later as an armed insurgency. Its current leader, Abubakar Shekau, is far more violent than Yusuf. [According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Dataset](#), Boko Haram was responsible for nearly half of all civilian deaths in African war zones in 2014 alone. The government’s heavy-handed response, which re-

sulted in [numerous civilian deaths](#), intensified the insurgency. This, together with high rates of northern youth unemployment, [sharp socio-economic inequalities between the North and South](#), and endemic corruption, further propelled Boko Haram recruitment.

### **What does Boko Haram want?**

Boko Haram declares that it wants to overthrow the Nigerian government and [replace it with an Islamic state](#). It similarly wants to expel the northern political and Muslim clerical establishments and rid Nigeria of all Western influences. Although these goals have remained constant, the preferred strategy for achieving them has shifted. Boko Haram under Yusuf was initially highly localized and believed that its “parallel state” would gradually replace the federal government and address Nigeria’s ills.

By contrast, under Abubakar Shekau, Boko Haram has looked beyond Nigeria and aligned itself to the global jihadist movement. This is evident [in its methods](#), which include the use of suicide bombers, improvised explosive devices, and beheadings. These tactics, which have escalated since 2013, were hitherto foreign to Nigeria’s insurgents and were not employed by Boko Haram before 2010. The group similarly expanded its networking with foreign terrorists such as al Shabaab and al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Finally, it embraced the global jihadist movement’s rhetoric against the “far enemy” such as encouraging attacks against Western targets outside of Nigeria.

### **Moving toward a Caliphate?**

In August 2014 Boko Haram declared a caliphate over areas under its control stating, [“We are in an Islamic Caliphate ... we have nothing whatsoever to do with Nigeria.”](#) This matched a shift in tactics from guerrilla-style attacks to the [strategic seizure and holding of territory](#). The borders of its declared caliphate [correspond almost precisely to the former borders of the Borno Caliphate](#), an attempt to tap into Muslim revivalism using this once powerful empire

as a reference point. [Boko Haram's declaration of loyalty to ISIS](#) further underscores Boko Haram's affinity for recreating a caliphate.

Boko Haram also declared an interest in administering the territories it controlled. When the group captured the town of Mubi in Adamawa State in November 2014, renaming it Madinatul Islam (the City of Islam), it urged residents not to flee, ordered the reopening of shops, and instructed its fighters to pay for goods. In practice, however, there is little indication that Boko Haram demonstrated a strong will or ability to govern effectively. Now facing territorial losses in the face of a multinational military offensive, it remains to be seen how Boko Haram will alter its claim of a caliphate.



Source: K. Aksoy

## How is the African military coalition faring against Boko Haram?

Nigeria's military response to the Boko Haram escalation from 2012-2014 had minimal effects. Boko Haram's territorial expansion continued and by the end of 2014, the group controlled 25 towns in the 3 northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa (about the size of Belgium). Maiduguri, with a population of 2 million people, was under attack. In January 2015, the African Union authorized the creation of a [Multinational Joint Force](#) bringing together forces from Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, and Benin, to conduct joint operations against Boko Haram. Even before the force was au-

thorized, however, Chad was already in action against the group under a separate bilateral military agreement. Landlocked and alarmed by the closure of key trade routes running through Boko Haram's territory, Chad had a strong incentive to intervene and its forces quickly shifted the military balance away from Boko Haram.

While the multinational effort has made decisive gains, the initiative is marked by tensions and minimal coordination between the partners. After Chadian forces recaptured the strategic town of Damasak in early March, President Idriss Déby complained that days after the town was retaken Nigerian forces had not arrived to receive it. "We are not an army of occupation ... by now we should have handed the town to Nigeria and continued advancing," he said in an interview.

Coordination between Nigeria and Cameroon is hampered by their long-running border dispute and Cameroon's denial of the right of "hot pursuit" into its territory. Cooperation with Niger, meanwhile, started off on the wrong foot after Niger accused Nigerian forces of "cowardice."

These difficulties notwithstanding, Boko Haram has been pushed out of all but a handful of territories, reflecting the group's weakness relative to sustained military pressure. For these multinational military gains to translate into genuine stability, however, offensive operations must be supported by a robust and trusted Nigerian security and governance presence, community engagement, educational opportunities, and development. Otherwise, history suggests, [the grievances that have spurred violent radical movements](#) in northern Nigeria will again take root.

## 5. Calibrating Domestic Security Responses

The date was June 11, 2009. Nearly 20 unarmed Boko Haram motorcyclists were fatally shot by police for refusing to wear safety helmets. The episode was the culmination of a series of confrontations with police that led the authorities to view the incident as a direct challenge. Boko Haram at the time, however, primarily operated as a religious cult and had not fully committed to violence. These members had been on their way to a funeral of one of their colleagues who had died in a car accident. The shooting triggered a 5-day uprising by sympathizers that spread to 4 northern states leading to more than 800 fatalities and the capture and mysterious death in police custody of Boko Haram's founder, Mohammed Yusuf. Members were tracked and killed, had their properties confiscated, and many were incarcerated. In disarray but vengeful, Boko Haram went underground. Yusuf's successor, Abubakar Shekau, adopted a far more militant approach. He appealed to his followers to regroup and [“redeem their honor.”](#) About a year and a half later, Boko Haram re-emerged as one of Africa's most brutal terrorist organizations. This sequence, a key turning point in Boko Haram's evolution, illustrates the limitations of overwhelmingly kinetic approaches to combating extremism.



Members of a local militia against Boko Haram  
Source: Voice of America

### A problematic military response

Starting in 2012, Boko Haram began staging coordinated attacks on military and civilian targets across northern Nigeria including near-weekly suicide bombings in major population centers. In response, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in May 2013 in three northeast states—Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa. The national government subsequently assembled a joint task force (JTF) of military, police, and customs officers to battle Boko Haram. The government simultaneously committed to an upswing in defense spending from \$800 million to \$5.4 billion between 2009 and 2014.

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*“offensive operations must be supported by a robust and trusted Nigerian security and governance presence, community engagement, educational opportunities, and development”*

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The JTF mission, however, has been criticized for indiscriminate arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings of suspected Boko Haram sympathizers and members. In one operation in Baga, in the northeastern state of Borno, JTF members reportedly [destroyed more than 2,000 buildings](#), apparently in retaliation for the killing of a soldier by Boko Haram.

This heavy-handed approach has, at best, been ineffective. Some have argued that it has been counterproductive. The frequency and intensity of Boko Haram attacks grew from 2013 to 2014. Meanwhile, the government's approach has alienated civilians and reduced their willingness to provide valuable intelligence about Boko Haram. [“The government cannot hope to defeat Boko Haram if it does not change its counterinsurgency strategy,”](#) says Hussein Solomon. Winning the trust and support of the population is indispensable.

This lack of trust is further perpetuated by [pre-existing faultlines](#), in particular between the relatively underdeveloped and predominantly Muslim North, where the insurgency is based, and the more affluent and largely Christian South. These dichotomies fuel perceptions among many northerners that they are being systematically marginalized by the secular authorities. Add to this the government's inability to protect civilians and the resulting [proliferation of vigilante groups](#), and the seeds for new iterations of instability may well be being sown.

### Governance and the rule of law

Addressing social and economic grievances that terrorist organizations exploit to win recruits is a crucial element in a larger strategy to combat extremism. Endemic corruption is also to blame. [Complaints about corruption in the judicial sector](#) are rife, including the practice of "buying judgments." With few trained forensic staff, police tend to rely on confessions, which form 60 percent of all prosecutions.



**Boko Haram Leader, Abubakar Shekau**  
*Source: Voice of America*

Human rights reports suggest, however, that some of these confessions are extracted under torture. The reintroduction of Sharia law in 12 northern states in 1999 was expected to be a means to counter the corruption of the secular justice system, strengthen the local population's sense of belonging to a national Nigerian fabric, and augment stability. However, this too has fall-

en short of expectations because Sharia courts are perceived by many to be as corrupt as their secular counterparts. Rejectionist and extremist ideologies are thriving in the wake of these ineffective governance initiatives and the perceived lack of justice. As a result, Boko Haram has a wide pool from which to win recruits.

### Building bridges

In Nigeria, traditional institutions exist in parallel with federal, state, and local governments and have historically played an important role in fostering nonviolent means of conflict resolution. Several have been involved in efforts to [counter youth radicalization in northern Nigeria](#). However, many youth seem to be shifting their loyalties away from traditional and religious institutions to Boko Haram and other extremist organizations.

The revered [Sultan of Sokoto](#) and his counterpart, the [Shehu of Borno](#), for instance, have publicly denounced Boko Haram and have been involved in high-level efforts to promote cooperation between Muslim communities (especially youth) and the government. They have also participated in an ongoing interfaith dialogue with Christian leaders. Yet these have not succeeded in stemming terrorist recruitment. At issue are two factors. First, many northerners question the credibility of their traditional and religious leaders who are often perceived to be part and parcel of the corrupt political establishment. Second, despite Nigeria's tradition of religious moderation, radical voices appear to be more successful in reaching youth than moderate ones.

Boko Haram, meanwhile, has made a point of violently targeting moderate imams so as to dissuade any moves toward reconciliation and compromise as this would [work against the group's polarizing agenda](#). These tensions have led some to suggest that the real tension in northern Nigeria is not necessarily between aggrieved Muslims and the secular federal government but a struggle within the Muslim community over whether and how to embrace moderation and



how to interpret Islamic jurisprudence. Scholar John Paden suggests that the [solution to this problem lies in working more closely with moderate voices](#) to push for national and local reforms, empower traditional leaders and promote interfaith dialogue.

In short, the rapid expansion of Boko Haram's influence in northern Nigeria is as much a reflection of ineffective and weak government presence at the federal, state, and local levels as of the dominance of Boko Haram militarily. "You cannot fix this insurgency without fixing the state," warns Hussein Solomon. Experience thus far suggests that combating extremist ideology and stabilizing northern Nigeria will require a multisectoral effort involving a calibrated military strategy, active governance initiatives at the local level, and building bridges with trusted, moderate community leaders.

## 6. Military Professionalism

Chadian troops and South African mercenaries were at the forefront of the push in early 2015 to [expel Boko Haram](#) from towns the group had occupied in northeastern Nigeria. In some instances, such as the group's stronghold in Damasak (Borno State), Boko Haram was routed in a day—revealing the military weakness of the group that had held the Nigerian Army at bay for years.

Chadian President Idriss Déby took notice of the [Nigerian military's absence](#), complaining it took days in some cases for the Nigerians to reclaim newly liberated towns. As much as anything, the Boko Haram insurgency, escalating since 2011, had exposed the deterioration of the Nigerian military's capacity—a military once touted as [the most capable in Africa](#).

### Why did Nigeria fail to contain Boko Haram?

Nigeria has a long legacy of military governments. It wasn't until 1999, under former Army General Olusegun Obasanjo, that Nigeria

started down the path of democracy. Obasanjo's election, however, did not sweep aside political interests cultivated under decades of military rule. Individuals from the previous military administrations remained influential. To prevent the threat of another coup, the new democratic government began a policy that slowly [starved the military](#) but fed its officers.



Sa'ad Abubakar, Sultan of Sokoto  
Source: ECOWAS

This pattern has persisted—even as the government ramped up funding for the military to combat Boko Haram. Between 2011 and 2015, annual military spending increased from \$2 billion to almost \$6 billion—making it one of the three largest defense budgets in Africa. Of the nearly \$6 billion, however, only [about \\$600 million](#) went to equipment (weapons and military hardware). The rest went to headquarters and staff elements of the armed forces, or [was taken for personal use](#) under the guise of enhancing security by various military and government officials.

The focus on officer training remains strong, explaining why Nigerian military students often excel at overseas military academies and why the country's professional military education institutions are a magnet for other African countries. However, when it comes to operations, the story is very different. In the North, the Nigerian Army lacked operational capacity to effectively carry out its mission. Limited resources

for the rank and file was one factor. (In October 2014, former President Jonathan sought a loan for [another \\$1 billion](#) specifically to purchase hardware for the troops in the North.)

Equally problematic is that the military's [force structure and mission are misaligned with the country's security challenges](#). The Nigerian Army is a conventional army in mindset, focused on an external enemy and serving on AU and UN peacekeeping missions. Due to the inability of the police and other segments of the Nigerian security sector to subdue Boko Haram, however, the military has been forced into a domestic security role for which it is ill-equipped and untrained. The Army's at times heavy-handed responses to Boko Haram attacks have resulted in numerous civilian casualties and have left much of the northern Nigerian population fearful of the military. Lacking strong ties to local communities, the Army has had little understanding of its foe, further limiting its effectiveness.

### Problems in command and control

The breakdown in the Nigerian military—from its inability to operationalize its mission, weak resource management, and poor morale, to human rights abuses against civilian—suggests weak command and control by the military brass.

There is little connection between official military policy and the acts of the rank and file. Senior Army leaders have been unable to explain [human rights abuses by their troops in the North](#) despite understanding how indiscriminate violence toward civilian populations undermines the Army's efforts among local communities. That these acts are either denied by the military or blamed on other actors perpetuates [a culture of impunity](#) that undermines the military's reputation among civilians and fosters deviant behavior among troops.

Despite the escalating threat of Boko Haram, [purchases of new weapons have been rare](#). The military usually buys refurbished equipment from other countries or cannibalizes exist-

ing systems for parts. Former U.S. Ambassador and Africa scholar John Campbell notes that sometimes “Ammunition and arms are budgeted and paid for, but [they don't always reach the front lines](#), either because they are diverted to the black market, or because the money actually went into a procurer's pocket.” The rank and file—not provided with adequate training, living conditions, equipment, or pay—suffer from low morale. Consequently, the Army has struggled with [mutinous soldiers](#). The Nigerian Army—one of Africa's largest—has become a hollow force.

### Lack of accountability

The patronage system that has divided the country into various turfs for local and national politicians has ensnared parts of the security sector as well. While there are many professional military officers who uphold high standards, there are others who subscribe to this form of co-option.

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*“lacking strong ties to local communities, the Army has had little understanding of its foe, further limiting its effectiveness”*

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In Nigeria, as in many African countries, parliaments rarely [oversee the military budget process](#). Contracting, moreover, is an opaque business frequently marked by inadequate oversight of military procurement practices. Illustrating this were the [secret arms deals authorized by Nigeria's national security adviser](#) while Army troops were supplied with inferior and inadequate arsenal.

Reports of fraudulent security contracts, commanders skimming from soldiers' pay, and troops being used by incumbents in local elections are widespread. The well-documented system of [“security votes”](#)—allowing state governors and other elected officials a disbursement

of unappropriated funds from the treasury for the purpose of enhancing security locally without the need to account for spending—has allowed some politicians to fund personal interests without scrutiny. Some of these [funds are likely to have gone directly to members of Boko Haram](#). Meanwhile, soldiers on the ground and the civilian population bear the consequences.

Ultimately the government’s politicization of the security sector and the military brass’ silence on the depletion of the defense budget by colleagues has directly compromised its effectiveness—and further erodes public trust in the Nigerian military.

During the electoral campaign, President Muhammadu Buhari promised to tackle [threats to peace and stability](#) in Nigeria. Rebuilding military professionalism will need to be a high priority on that list.



President of Nigeria Muhammadu Buhari  
Source: Chatham House

## 7. Maritime Security

Another fundamental security challenge Nigeria’s new leaders must face lies at sea. The security of the Gulf of Guinea is integral to the economic health of West Africa. The Gulf is the transit hub for much of the region’s \$253 billion of commerce—most notably petroleum products. Yet, in recent years, the Gulf of Guinea

has also become a hotbed of piracy, overshadowing the Gulf of Aden. In 2014, there were just 11 incidents in the latter compared to 41 in the Gulf of Guinea.

Pirates brazenly steal oil and cargo from the many defenseless and isolated vessels transiting the Gulf. In recent years, [kidnap-for-ransom incidents](#) have increased, reflecting the greater return on investment. For example, the three VLCC Kalamos crew kidnapped in February 2015 were reportedly ransomed for \$400,000 a few weeks later.



Fishing vessels net large quantities of quarry from West Africa’s waters without anyone knowing. Illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing accounts for about [40 percent of fish](#) caught in West Africa. The Gulf of Guinea also remains an important transshipment point for narcotics trafficking from Latin America to Europe. The UN estimated about \$1.5 billion worth of cocaine passed through West Africa in 2013.

Piracy and maritime crime are the most pronounced in and around the territorial waters of Nigeria, the region’s top oil producer. Nigeria loses between 40,000 and 100,000 barrels of oil a day due to theft. According to Nigerian Chief of Naval Staff Usman Jibrin, oil theft alone costs the Nigerian government 433 billion naira (about \$2 billion) each year. The Ministry of Finance claims this number is even higher.

## Piracy and crime in and around Nigeria's waters

Many of the [pirates in the Gulf of Guinea come from the militarized groups](#) of Nigeria's oil-producing Niger Delta region. These groups were offered an amnesty arrangement—lay down arms in exchange for a monthly stipend and job training. But the amnesty, which is scheduled to end in 2015, [has achieved mixed results](#). In an area with extensive environmental damage and few employment opportunities, oil theft has proven to be a reliable source of income for many youth in the Delta. In 2013, [1,951 illegal oil refineries](#) were destroyed in the Niger Delta alone.

Groups with access to weapons and boats—be they ex-insurgents, local gangs, members of international organized criminal networks—have advanced from stealing oil in the inland waterways to hijacking cargo and tanker ships on the high seas. Delta-based pirates have gone so far as to take a vessel from its Angolan anchorage 900 nautical miles (nmi) away.

Collusion among pirates, compromised elements in the oil industry and security agencies, as well as international organized criminal networks helps piracy thrive. This underscores the challenge of strengthening military professionalism throughout the Nigerian security sector—and not just in northern Nigeria.

### Addressing the Challenges

Nigeria has been developing its maritime security strategy to address piracy and crime in its waters. Joint task forces (mostly between the Nigerian Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA) and the Nigerian Navy) conduct law enforcement and antipiracy patrols backed with electronic surveillance assets that can track the International Maritime Organization number for all cooperating vessels in Nigerian waters. This represents only a proportion of all ships, however. Strengthening maritime domain awareness—the knowledge of the move-

ments of all craft transiting Nigerian waters—must be a top priority.



Source: *PresidentistVB*

In 2013, the Nigerian Navy, with two private maritime security firms, launched a [Secure Anchorage Area](#) (SAA) around Lagos Port—an area clogged with hundreds of vulnerable vessels waiting for days to offload cargo due to the antiquated facilities ashore. In the SAA, the Navy offers armed protection for ships wishing to either anchor or conduct ship-to-ship transfers offshore.

The SAA is an example of how Nigeria and its neighbors can better manage their maritime space. In addition to designated anchorage sites, clearly defined transit corridors (much like the International Recommended Transit Corridor in the Gulf of Aden) are needed—not only across the region, but also within each country's territorial waters. With designated shipping lanes and anchorage sites channeling merchant vessel traffic into narrow routes, enforcement agencies like NIMASA would be able to focus and simplify their patrol and surveillance demands.

Nigeria has teamed up with its neighbors to create [regional security zones](#) across the Gulf of Guinea. This is in recognition of the fact that the West African countries must harmonize their law enforcement tactics to prevent pirates from merely moving their activities to the most vulnerable or least punishing jurisdiction. How-

ever, partnering states have struggled to operationalize these coordination mechanisms.

One key gap is in the area of assets. To patrol its 459 nmi of coastline and waters going out 200 nmi, Nigeria has only 2 frigates, 10 large patrol boats, 15 small patrol craft (inshore patrol craft and seaward defence boats), and 4 maritime patrol aircraft. And Nigeria is one of the better resourced littoral states in the region. At a minimum, says Rear Admiral [Adeniyi Adeniji Osinowo](#) of the Nigerian Navy, West Africa would need 90 offshore patrol vessels to cover its 3,000 nmi of coastline. Currently, the region has only 32. As a result, Nigeria, as well as some of its neighbors, has come to rely on private military and security contractors. The rise in the number of contractors could become a concern itself, however, as they have financial incentives to see the security threats they're combating persist.



Source: Dulue Mbachu/ISN

## Back Onshore

Addressing maritime security is ultimately tied back onshore. The greatest concentration of theft and piracy occurs within 12 nmi of Nigeria's shores. The Niger Delta waterways where ex-militants have built illegal oil bunkering and refining businesses in collusion with some security and political officials are particularly problematic. While not the driving factor, economic and political marginalization of populations in

the Niger Delta create a steady pool of recruitment for piracy. The sooner the new government tackles this challenge, the sooner it may dry up that pool.

## 8. Governance

While not a conventional security topic, governance is a central feature in the often internal or societally based threats Nigeria faces. From ethno-religious faultlines to rising extremism among marginalized communities to weak military professionalism, a common theme for virtually all of Nigeria's security challenges is poor governance. In many instances these security concerns are, in fact, symptoms of weak, exclusionary, or exploitative government processes. These security issues, therefore, will persist until the underlying problems of governance are addressed.

### How poor governance got us here

Without good governance, a country makes itself vulnerable to drivers of insecurity. Take the rise of Boko Haram. On its own the organization has never been militarily powerful. However, it has been able to tap into grievances and mobilize marginalized Muslim communities in parts of northeastern Nigeria to propagate its extremist ideology and violence. Populations in northern Nigeria, for example, frequently exhibit quality of life indicators that are half that of other parts of the country. Similarly, income and economic opportunities remain relatively underdeveloped in the North. This sense of socioeconomic marginalization combined with the perception of collusion between northern politicians and the federal government have provided Boko Haram the levers it needs to recruit and wage its insurgency.

The widely fluctuating tactics used by the government in handling the Boko Haram challenge also illustrate the importance of political will for effecting security. The government has alternated between heavy-handedness (including actions that have generated [allegations](#) of

human rights violations) and passive responses (such as when the Chibok school girls were kidnapped). Once the government (in conjunction with neighboring armies) resolved to tackle it, Boko Haram was easily routed from the territories it held at the beginning of 2015.

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*“West African countries must harmonize their law enforcement tactics to prevent pirates from merely moving their activities to the most vulnerable or least punishing jurisdiction”*

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Boko Haram can and likely will be defeated. However, until the government earns the confidence and trust of its citizens, any security gains realized will not be sustained. The lure of insurgency against the status quo, often infused with a religious cause, will continue to draw disaffected youth. There were radicalizing elements in northern Nigeria before Boko Haram, and the same insurrectionist messages will be present after Boko Haram is dismantled. The government’s goal, therefore, should be to establish enough credibility and legitimacy with local populations so that such messages will fall on deaf ears.

### Corruption and insecurity

Research shows there is a [“tipping point”](#) whereby once a threshold of institutional corruption is reached, for every slight increase in perceived corruption, a large decrease in domestic security follows. Nigeria ranks among the 38 most corrupt countries in the world (it scores 27 on a scale of 0 [very corrupt] to 100 [very clean] for perceived level of public sector corruption). Nigeria’s political patronage system and high-level corruption are well documented. More than half of the Nigerians surveyed by [Transparency International](#) have paid a bribe.

Peace and prosperity are most susceptible to the corruption of security institutions, especially the police and justice sectors. In Nigeria, crowd-

sourced websites track in real time where police are attempting to collect bribes from motorists. The level of perceived corruption of Nigerian police is problematic (92 percent of those surveyed by Transparency International). According to the [Institute for Economics and Peace](#), as perceptions of police and judicial corruption increase, trust in these institutions declines. As this sentiment takes hold, norms shift, and citizens begin acting in a more lawless manner themselves. A country is then more likely to experience violent crime, conflict, and eventually political terror. When the judiciary fails to bring perpetrators to justice, citizens no longer feel safe and change their behavior accordingly. This, in turn, negatively affects socioeconomic activity.

In contrast, as [corruption decreases, prospects for stability improve](#). As countries become more open and peaceful, there is a marked decline in the perceptions of police and judicial corruption. Countries with stronger democratic institutions tend to show the lowest levels of perceived corruption.



Police officer collecting N20.00 note at a roadblock  
Source: [nigeriamasterweb.com](#)

### Good governance is about building trust

Controlling corruption is closely linked to building trust. Communities in marginalized areas are looking for tangible demonstrations of government commitment to improving the lives of the poor—especially in the area of public

goods such as roads, educational opportunities, health services, and communications infrastructure. This requires more than allocating funds for these development initiatives. It also requires establishing the oversight mechanisms to ensure these resources have their intended impact.

Building trust in government depends not just on the physical outputs but also on the “process” by which the government engages communities. This will entail acting with transparency and accountability in the selection and implementation of development projects. This engagement, in turn, can diminish perceptions of inequality and partisanship. In other words, mobilizing catalysts for organized violence are often based on a sense of relative deprivation. If, instead, the government is seen as inclusive and even-handed in its engagements, this lever of mobilization will diminish.

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***“Boko Haram can and likely will be defeated. However, until the government earns the confidence and trust of its citizens, any security gains realized will not be sustained”***

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Trust can also be strengthened by engaging a wide range of individuals from marginalized communities in a dialogue so they can assert their preferences and gain some ownership of public initiatives in their localities. Building trust will also require active communication so that citizens in marginalized areas understand what the government is doing on citizens’ behalf. In so doing, the government is also better able to counter the negative messages of insurgent groups.

The creation of a transparent and participatory political system will require more direct input from civil society reflecting diverse local actors, particularly women and young people. This will also at the outset require more time for citizens to articulate the injustices they have endured so that tensions do not fester. Citizens must see that they have opportunities to be

heard and to succeed working within the system rather than outside or against it. As Nigeria’s leaders engage these diverse voices, they will earn trust and be better able to articulate visions transcending sectarian interests.





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