**The Ties that Bind: Severance, Inequality and Ethnicity**

*Examining Boko Haram’s Trans-national Insurgency*

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**Table of Contents**

Introduction……………………………………………………………………………………… 1

Origins of the Insurgency………………………………………………………………………… 4

The Government’s Response…………………………………………………………………….. 12

Theorizing the Outbreak of Violence …………………….……………………………………... 16

Generating Hypotheses…………………………………………………………………………... 23

Severance and its Effects…………….……………………………………………………………26

The Insurgency’s Significance……………………………………………………………………. 29

Conclusion……………………………………………………………………………………… 32

Bibliography………………………………………………………………………………………37

**Introduction**

On the 11th July 2015, a man dressed in a burqa walked into the main market of N’djamena, Chad, and detonated a bomb.[[1]](#footnote-1) The explosion killed 15 people and injured 80 others, prompting a flurry of draconian anti-terror legislation, including the enforcement of a previously-proposed legal ban on the niqab.[[2]](#footnote-2) The incident itself is notable for the heavy-handed response it provoked; Chad is a majority Muslim country.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, it speaks to a larger pattern of violence that is present in much of Sahellian West Africa. Boko Haram, a radical Islamist group with roots in North-Eastern Nigeria, claimed responsibility for the attack.[[4]](#footnote-4) In doing so, it forced the Nigerian government to formally acknowledge that the insurgency they had been battling for the past 6 years had become a major trans-national threat.

In the past decade, Boko Haram has evolved from a small preaching group in Maiduguri, Nigeria to an effective fighting force that has shocked the international community with spectacular and chilling displays of violence. While international attention has mostly focused on remarkable events such as the Baga massacre, in which an estimated 2000 Nigerian citizens were killed,[[5]](#footnote-5) Boko Haram has also created a constant stream of low-level violence, including near-daily suicide bombs. Since 2014 Boko Haram has been expanding, staging major assaults in the neighbouring countries of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The result is a trans-national insurgency that has taken thousands of lives, displaced an estimated 2 million people and prompted the creation of a multi-national joint force. [[6]](#footnote-6) The progression of Boko Haram prompts a difficult question: why did a formerly peaceful religious group turn into a violent terrorist organization?

Journalistic accounts of the insurgency tend to conceal this puzzle. The Sahel region is often portrayed as one large chunk of completely ungovernable space, a nexus between narratives of state failure, ethnic tension, Islamic extremism, destructive climate change and drug trafficking.[[7]](#footnote-7) Such an anarchic space seems permanently vulnerable to violent challenges, to the extent that no particular instance of unrest is seen as surprising. This general atmosphere of chaos clouds the specificity of the violence that we observe; it neither explains the location of violence nor its onset. The structural problems that each country faces are important, but they are not insurmountable. Regional bodies such as the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have made significant strides as instruments for good governance, resolving border disputes,[[8]](#footnote-8) providing a mechanism to address human rights violations[[9]](#footnote-9) and guaranteeing security through peacekeeping.[[10]](#footnote-10) ECOWAS’ diplomatic efforts contributed significantly to the ceasefire and peace agreement that brought an end to Mali’s recent insurgency, demonstrating their capacity to resolve disputes.[[11]](#footnote-11) Boko Haram has demonstrated that they are sensitive to shifts in government policy, changing tactics in response to political and military developments. If we argue that their decision to use violence is both strategic and contingent, how can we understand it?

There is a well-developed literature that aims to explain the onset of violence. Violent rebellion requires both motivation and opportunity, creating distinct kinds of explanations. The motivation for insurgencies is usually attributed to either greed or grievance. Neither fits Boko Haram perfectly. First, Boko Haram have resisted efforts to pacify them through lucrative amnesty agreements, despite the credible precedent set by similar deals with insurgents in the oil-rich Niger Delta region.[[12]](#footnote-12) Second, the grievances that motivate Boko Haram are structural and long-standing, providing little insight into why violence erupted at a specific time, in a particular fashion.

This paper argues that Boko Haram’s turn to violence is a consequence of their severance from local patronage networks, both due to their own failure to maintain the support of mainstream salafists and as a result of government pressure on the organisation. Political exclusion limited their ability to influence government policy through peaceful means, leaving violent challenge as the best method for pursuing their ideological goals. I will examine how long-standing regional grievances interacted with national politics to produce this exclusion. In doing so I hope to develop an explanation of the insurgency that is dynamic, enabling us to understand its timing.

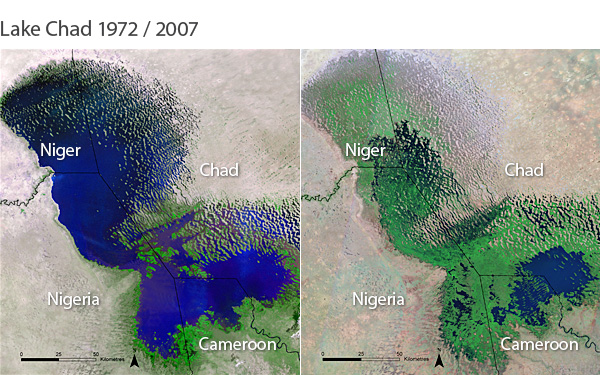
First, we will analyse the roots of the insurgency, drawing out the narratives of grievance that won early recruits, describing the onset of violence and depicting the government’s response. Second, we will review the literature on the onset of violence within insurgencies and generate hypotheses on Boko Haram’s emergence. Third, we will defend our chosen hypothesis, describing the mechanism that translated political exclusion into a violent, trans-national insurgency. Finally, we will evaluate the broader significance of the insurgency, assessing the policy implications of our argument.

**Origins of the Insurgency**

*Jamiat ahl al Sunnah lil Daw’ati wal Jihad* (the group for propagation of teaching and jihad) was officially founded in 2002. The group began in Borno state, in the North East corner of Nigeria that also borders Niger, Cameroon and Chad.[[13]](#footnote-13) This region is the poorest in the country,[[14]](#footnote-14) with the lowest rates of university education.[[15]](#footnote-15) They came to be known as *Boko Haram* (Western education is forbidden) due to their fierce criticism of secular forms of education. *Boko* is a complex concept, capturing notions of “inauthenticity, literacy in Roman script”[[16]](#footnote-16) anuary 12. A015, a Opinion ety”ssed online 2 r thand forms of knowledge “of non-Arabic and non-Islamic origin.”[[17]](#footnote-17) Early Northern nationalists made use of similar concepts in Nigeria’s early post-independence discourse, articulating the fear that the greater prevalence of secular, Western education in the South would lead to political domination. *Boko*, therefore is a concept with long-standing and wide legitimacy in the North of Nigeria. In its current use, it is more accurate to characterise it as Western civilisation, since it is supposed to ‘affirm [Boko Haram’s] belief in the supremacy of Islamic culture’[[18]](#footnote-18) more generally. While the name does not capture the entirety of their ideological identity, it distils it down to its most important aspects. First, it draws out their focus on criticising secular governance and denying the legitimacy of non-religious authority. Second, the explicit treatment of education reflects their prioritisation of capturing the youth.

Boko Haram, similarly to many other radical Islamist organisations is Salafist in orientation. The term Salafism comes from the phrase *al salif al salih* (the righteous forefathers).[[19]](#footnote-19) The name reflects the view that the Qur’an should be interpreted in a literalist, exoteric manner, and should be practiced as similarly as possible to the original followers of the Prophet Muhammed. Accounts differ on how exactly Boko Haram was founded,[[20]](#footnote-20) but there is consensus that its membership was drawn from a number of other radical groups. Many of these were formed by radical university students at the University of Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno State. Groups such as *Al-Muhajiroun* (the pilgrims) initially seemed to have adopted the quietist strain of Salafism, which prompts followers to withdraw from secular life.[[21]](#footnote-21) Adherents must refrain from being educated at secular schools, taking jobs in the civil service and participating in government programs.

Hence, the antecedents to Boko Haram were focused on acquiring land in rural areas to establish a sanctuary. Much of the early violence that came to be associated with Boko Haram is the result of tension between these groups and the local populations within which they tried to acquire land. Eventually, a number of these groups coalesced around Mohammed Yusuf, a Maiduguri native who preached at a popular mosque. Yusuf’s eventual leadership was largely a result of his ability to establish a successful base, free of secular influences. He used ‘land owned by his father in law’[[22]](#footnote-22) to establish the Ibn Taimiyyah mosque, prompting failed pilgrims to return to the city centre.

From his Maiduguri headquarters, Mohammed Yusuf established a preaching group that proselytised to the public and educated followers on the evils of the secular Nigerian state.[[23]](#footnote-23) Yusuf’s message struck a particular chord among disaffected Kanuri youths, who were disenfranchised by high rates of unemployment and limited opportunities for social mobility. Both environmental and political factors play a role in these socio-economic challenges. The North of Nigeria had traditionally enjoyed a comparative advantage in the production of agriculture, acting as the bread basin for the remainder of the country. The 1970’s oil boom redirected the focus of the economy, depriving the region of the investment needed to transition into large-scale mechanised agriculture, and remain competitive internationally. Simultaneously, climate change began to deprive the region of its natural resources. The Lake Chad Basin, pictured in Fig. 1, provides water and a source of livelihood to a population of 30 million people, across four countries.[[24]](#footnote-24) It has been depleted by up to 90% over the past three decades, creating significant pressure on the population.

*Fig. 1 depicts the size of Lake Chad in 1972 (left-hand side) as compared to 2007 (right hand side). [[25]](#footnote-25)*

Alternative industries are difficult to develop, given the limited infrastructure and lack of human capital within the region.[[26]](#footnote-26) Endemic corruption, combined with the neo-patrimonial nature of Nigeria’s institutions has robbed most of the population of basic governmental services, making it difficult to access healthcare, electricity and higher education.[[27]](#footnote-27) While there are formal rules on how public resources should be distributed, individual politicians enjoy a large amount of discretion and little fear of punishment, allowing personal connections to take advantage of the state.[[28]](#footnote-28) The private use of public institutions has exacerbated economic inequality, dividing citizens into the lucky few with access to government, and the unfortunate majority without it. We can observe this dynamic on both a local and a national scale. At the state level, patronage may be distributed to personal acquaintances and family members. At the national level however, it is often distributed to particular tribes. The Kanuri ethnic group that populates the Lake Chad region experienced a serious reversal of power after the reestablishment of democracy in 1999. While they had previously benefitted from the largesse of a coethnic, the former military dictator Sani Abacha (Lewis, Robinson and Rubin, 1998), they have yet to regain similar status in the democratic era (Lewis, Robinson and Rubin, 1998). Thus, poorly-connected Kanuris in this region are doubly discriminated against.

Socio-cultural factors compound this inequality. Many Northern tribes have an aristocratic, patrician culture that is not conducive to social mobility through non-economic means. Intermarriage and meaningful social connections between classes are relatively rare, providing limited opportunity to socialise one’s way into the elite. Similary, the paucity of jobs for the highly educated prevents many Northerners from working their way into prosperity. Therefore, lower and middle class individuals at university are uniquely susceptible to radical politics, stuck in the disconnect between raised expectations and a continually disappointing reality. Their education affords them political sophistication but falls short of providing real economic benefits.

Yusuf’s command of this key voting bloc drew the attention of local politicians, who attempted to exchange patronage for political support. Ali Modu Sheriff, a senator representing Borno State allegedly cut a deal with Yusuf, exchanging his backing of Sheriff’s bid for governor for the institution of sharia law in the civil code, the promise to protect the *Ibn Tamiyyah* mosque from harassment and a significant number of key government appointments.[[29]](#footnote-29) Yusuf delivered by dedicating several sermons to criticizing Sheriff’s opponents, attacking their Islamic credentials. Lower level members of the group acted as election thugs, suppressing the turnout in constituencies favourable to his opponents and stuffing ballot boxes.

After Sheriff was elected in 2003, the organization received an influx of cash. Yusuf used their financial resources to gain a larger following, funding ‘a micro-credit scheme for his followers and giv[ing] welfare, food and shelter to refugees and unemployed youth.’[[30]](#footnote-30) Beneficiaries of the scheme invested it in businesses, donating the profits back to the organisation. Yusuf directed lieutenants to buy and stock weapons for self-defence, possibly as a result of the organisation’s previous history with hostile local populations. These developments seemed to mark the beginning of a fruitful and durable alliance. However, frustrations developed due to the perception that Governor Sheriff had not delivered on his policy promises. By the 2007 election, Sheriff was able to use the advantages of the incumbency to ensure his second bid for governor, removing the need for this alliance. In protest, Boko Haram lieutenant Buji Foi, who had been appointed religious affairs commissioner, resigned from his post.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Simultaneously, Yusuf burned his bridges with mainstream salafist organisations. His extreme sermons, which often criticised local Islamic authorities, began to provoke severe backlash, particularly from his former teacher, and prominent cleric Sheikh Ja’far Mahmud Adam.[[32]](#footnote-32) By 2009, the relationships between Boko Haram and local support networks had significantly disintegrated. Previously, debates between Boko Haram and other salafist groups had centred on the appropriate way for Muslims to engage with secular life, eliciting a fairly diverse set of responses.[[33]](#footnote-33) Increasingly however, Yusuf began to engage in *takfir,* the politically-charged practice by which one Muslim denounces another as an apostate.[[34]](#footnote-34) Mainstream salafist groups began to warn the government of their activity, arguing that they were radicalising the population.[[35]](#footnote-35) The government responded by charging Yusuf with terrorism, but failed to find sufficient evidence to keep him in prison. His arrest sparked a series of clashes between Boko Haram members and the police, culminating in a shootout at the funeral of a prominent Boko Haram member.[[36]](#footnote-36) Consequently, Yusuf was arrested, and executed in police custody on the 30th of July 2009.[[37]](#footnote-37) The violence that this sparked marks the official beginning of the insurgency.

After Yusuf’s extra-judicial assassination, the government staged a full-scale crackdown, arresting hundreds of suspected Boko Haram members, holding them without charge and executing several key figures in the leadership. The insurgency reached the definitional threshold for civil war during this period, creating an excess of 1,000 battle related deaths.[[38]](#footnote-38) At first, it seemed that this heavy-handed militaristic strategy had been successful. The insurgents appeared to have disbanded and the large public meetings that had previously marked their presence drew to a close. However, the ceasefire did not last long. What seemed to have been a disappearance was really a tactical retreat. Boko Haram re-emerged in 2010 under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau, a radical lieutenant of Yusuf’s. Shekau directed prison breaks to recover incarcerated members and provoked numerous clashes with local police officers. [[39]](#footnote-39) 2011 marked a significant development in the insurgency, as Boko Haram demonstrated their ability to bomb major symbols of governmental authority. A bomb was planted at the headquarters of the national police force, [[40]](#footnote-40) closely followed by an additional detonation at the headquarters of the United Nations. [[41]](#footnote-41)

By 2012, in conjunction with regular raids on army barracks and bombings, Boko Haram began to create regular stream of propaganda videos, threatening government figures and Islamic elites with assassination and criticizing contemporary political developments. The mountain ranges of neighbouring Cameroon became a sanctuary for insurgents, prompting clashes along the border with Cameroon’s army. Chad and Niger experienced similar low-level insurgent activity. The death toll from the insurgency surpassed the peak that was established in 2009, creating 1,083 deaths during 2012 alone.[[42]](#footnote-42)

The following year can be described as a period of experimentation, with no clear pattern to the group’s activities. Some of Boko Haram’s actions can be characterised as attacking symbols of Western civilisation and secularism, such as the school shooting in Yobe State[[43]](#footnote-43) and the attack on female aid workers distributing polio vaccines.[[44]](#footnote-44) Others seemed to be aimed at furthering the practice of *takfir*, attacking mosques that were deemed insufficiently Islamic,[[45]](#footnote-45) or major population centres in majority Muslim areas.[[46]](#footnote-46) The government declared a state of emergency on the 14th of May 2013,[[47]](#footnote-47) providing the army with wide powers to enforce law and order in Yobe, Borno and Adamawa states.

By 2014, they graduated from guerrilla tactics, actively capturing swathes of territory in the North East and instituting codes of law and order. At their height, they controlled a territory the size of Belgium,[[48]](#footnote-48) outraging the international community with the kidnapping of over 200 female students from their school in Chibok, Borno.[[49]](#footnote-49) Concurrently, they expanded internationally, staging attacks and mass kidnappings in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. While previously, their international activity had been sporadic and limited, major events such as the bombing of border town Diffa,[[50]](#footnote-50) the kidnap of the wife of Cameroon’s Vice-President,[[51]](#footnote-51) and the bombing of a major marketplace in N’djamena occurred within a concentrated time period. [[52]](#footnote-52) These major events brought Niger, Cameroon and Chad into the heart of Nigeria’s counter-insurgency efforts.[[53]](#footnote-53)

In 2015, the affected countries, along with the Republic of Benin, created a multi-national force with the right to cross borders in pursuit of insurgents.[[54]](#footnote-54) The offensive led by this joint force has significantly decreased Boko Haram’s ability to hold territory, and been successful in the majority of direct confrontations between the two parties.[[55]](#footnote-55) As a result, Boko Haram have been forced to return to guerrilla-style warfare. In response, they have unleashed a wave of rural terrorism, attacking several small towns and villages that are poorly defended by security services. Suicide bombings continue to be a popular tactic, with the increasing use of children and female captives as perpetrators.[[56]](#footnote-56)

**The Government’s Response**

The government’s response to Boko Haram was hampered by a profound political crisis which set Nigeria’s Northern and Southern elites at odds. In reality, Nigeria is a very heterogeneous society with cleavages that cross-cut each other. However, in terms of coalition building it has divided itself up into Muslim Northern and Christian Southern power bases. Once democracy was re-established in 1999, the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) swept the elections by forming a genuinely national party that was able to capture both of these key groups. In fact, the party was a continuation of the G-34, ‘a group of 34 eminent Nigerians drawn from all sections of the country, who spoke out against Abacha’s plan for self succession.’[[57]](#footnote-57) To maintain balance, they established an informal coalition agreement in which power would rotate between the Northern and Southern power blocks.

After two terms of Southern President Olusegun Obasanjo, power rotated back to the North in 2007, with the election of Umaru Yar’adua. In 2009 he died in office, leaving his Southern Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan to carry out the rest of his term. Contrary to expectations, Jonathan not only served out the remainder of Yaradua’s term, but ran again in 2011. This split the party, leading disaffected Northern governors to threaten to make the country ‘ungovernable.’[[58]](#footnote-58) The massive escalation of Boko Haram’s insurgency coincided with this fractionalisation.

In this way, two separate narratives of the conflict were immediately created. Many associates of the President continued to insist that Boko Haram was a proxy of Northern elites, who were using the insurgency to embarrass and undermine a Presidency that they viewed as illegitimate. Conversely, many Northerners believed that the Presidency was deliberately declining to contain this radical insurgency in an effort to supress the Northern vote and decrease their political influence. Both narratives have elements of truth. On one hand, it is indeed accurate to describe pre-insurgency Boko Haram as a state sponsored militia who enjoyed a close association with major government figures. However, regarding them as a proxy of Northern elites ignores the *takfiri* element of their ideology, which casts them as a uniquely pure and unadulterated force surrounded by a Northern elite who had allowed themselves to be corrupted by secular influences. Their consistent targeting of key Islamic figures in the North evinces the sharp rupture between them and conventional authorities within the region.

On the other hand, it is fair to characterise President Jonathan’s response to the insurgency as deeply politicised and woefully incompetent. Jonathan projected uncertainty on how to handle the insurgency, flitting between a heavy-handed militaristic response and attempts to offer an amnesty deal. During the state of emergency, several soldiers complained of a dearth of usable equipment, despite the fact that the security budget has increased every year since 2009.[[59]](#footnote-59) This led to widespread speculation that the President and other senior party figures were siphoning funds away from the counter-insurgency effort.[[60]](#footnote-60) Further criticism came from human rights organizations, who attacked his failure to respond to accusations of extra-judicial executions and his decision to establish and arm a civilian joint task force, bringing local vigilantes into a complex network of armed actors in the region. [[61]](#footnote-61) Moreover, President Jonathan deferred calls to adopt a middle path, combining military action with economic stimulus until 2013.[[62]](#footnote-62)

A series of media gaffes drew the ire of the Nigerian public. Media representatives of the President refused to comment on the massacre at Baga, while simultaneously decrying the Paris attacks on satirical magazine *Charlie Hebdo*.[[63]](#footnote-63) In addition, they insisted that the Chibok kidnapping was an elaborate hoax, refusing to present a response until a series of popular protests were held in the capital.[[64]](#footnote-64) Apparently blind to the implications, Jonathan would later repurpose the slogan of the protesters for his re-election campaign. While the former insisted that the government ‘Bring Back Our Girls’, Jonathan’s campaign advised citizens to ‘Bring Back Jonathan.’[[65]](#footnote-65)

However, there is little concrete evidence to suggest that counter-insurgency was deliberately sabotaged. Apart from participating in regional peacekeeping, Nigeria’s army has not been involved in a major war since 1970. The army is trained to tackle conventional warfare and has little ability to fend off guerrilla fighters, particularly those who are deeply embedded in the local population. Economic counter-insurgency may well have been ineffective, given that the benefits can only be experienced by the local population in the long term and require a minimum level of security to be instituted. In addition, media gaffes during Jonathan’s presidency were neither rare nor unique to the Boko Haram insurgency. Ineptitude alone does not evince a deliberate policy to mismanage the insurgency.

These two opposing narratives significantly hampered the response to Boko Haram, preventing various power-brokers from coordinating on a more effective and consistent strategy.

President Jonathan ran for a second term in 2015, but faced staunch criticism from local and international observers, who accused him him of being ineffectual, corrupt and cavalier about the suffering of his own citizens. Several powerbrokers within his party defected towards a newly formed opposition party, named the All Progressives Congress (APC). The APC was a marriage of strange bedfellows, combining a number of regionally based opposition parties with dissidents from within the PDP. Elections were held in March, bringing the spartan, disciplined former military dictator Muhammadu Buhari back into power,[[66]](#footnote-66) under the opposition party ticket. Buhari has worked quickly to strengthen alliances between Nigeria and its international partners and reframe the Boko Haram issue as trans-national. This reconceptualisation of the insurgency motivated new analyses that sought to understand why Boko Haram had become an existential threat.

**Theorizing the Outbreak of Violence**

In this section, I will review the literature that aims to explain why violent insurgencies occur, discussing its limitations and presenting an alternative argument that focuses on severance from political power. The literature can generally be divided into two sections. The first focuses on individual motivations to participate in insurgencies, using insights from psychology to explain political outcomes. The second concentrates on facilitating factors that create opportunities for insurgencies to occur.

Gurr (1970) is firmly embedded in the first section, suggesting that relative deprivation is the major catalyst for violent rebellion. He defines relative deprivation as the perceived discrepancy between expectations and capabilities, with a particular focus on economic inequality. In his argument, the cognitive dissonance between citizens’ economic expectations and their reality causes frustration, subsequently followed by aggression. This disparity may be the result of a purely internal economic calculus or of class conflict, since interactions with wealthier individuals may fuel rising expectations. Hence, Gurr’s logic has also been applied to structural imbalances in land ownership (Muller 1985).

Collier and Hoeffler (2004) take a more cynical approach to insurgent mobilization, regarding insurgents as fundamentally greedy and opportunistic actors. This insight is based on the strong empirical link between the presence of natural resources and the incidence of rebellion. Opportunists join insurgent groups to enrich themselves, establishing control over territories that produce valuable resources and predating on local populations. Poverty makes individuals more susceptible to recruitment, since the opportunity cost of joining a violent rebellion is relatively lower. Sierra Leone’s 1991-2002 civil conflict is often viewed as a classic example of this form of economically motivated conflict, given that it set non-ideological armed groups in competition with the government over control of the diamond trade.

The challenge with arguments based on grievance, whether they refer to economic inequality or some form of socio-cultural discrimination,[[67]](#footnote-67) is that they over-predict the incidence of violence. Fearon and Laitin (2003) note that, while insurgencies are relatively rare, grievances against the state are common to many polities. In addition, the relationship between grievance and the outbreak of insurgency is non-monotonic. There are instances of severe grievances that are not met with violence, while instances of less serious grievances have created violent conflict. Similarly, greed-based arguments reveal problems under closer scrutiny. Gutierrez Sanin (2004) has argued that the analogy between insurgent groups and criminal actors ignores the extent to which ideological and mundane motivations may change during the course of the war, with important consequences for individual decisions to join. In addition, his analysis of another paradigmatic case, the ongoing conflict between FARC and the Colombian government suggests that insurgents experience significant levels of hardship during insurgencies and receive limited rewards.

Therefore, more recent work has turned away from individual motivations and focused on factors that facilitate insurgencies. Fearon and Laitin (2003) identify state capacity as a key variable, noting that insurgencies will only last as long as they are able to avoid being defeated by the state. They use GDP/ capita as a proxy for state capacity, arguing that poor states lack the resources to create efficient police forces and militaries, leaving them vulnerable to violent challenges. Furthermore, poor states are unable to build key infrastructure, such as roads, that enable security forces to maintain their monopoly on violence. This is particularly important in relation to violent outbreaks in peripheral areas of the country.

Fearon and Laitin’s argument pays particular attention to the idea that insurgencies are fundamentally technologies of violence. Insurgencies generally imply the presence of small but highly mobile armed groups who use guerilla tactics to progressively wear down a stronger opponent. With this idea in mind, the authors test independent variables that are particularly related to successful insurgencies, finding that large populations and the presence of rough terrain are significantly associated with violence. The mechanisms at play are fairly clear. A large population provides a significant pool of potential recruits, while rough terrain, such as mountains or dense forest, provides a method for insurgents to hide away and avoid state capture. While foreign financing and support failed to demonstrate a strong empirical link, due to the difficulties in identifying foreign sponsors, the logic of argument suggests that close attention should be paid to this factor, particularly if there is unambiguous evidence of foreign support.

Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug (2013) synthesize both of these approaches, noting that insurgencies require both motivation and opportunity to occur. They identify ethnic exclusion, defined as the exclusion of a particular ethnic group from access to political power, as their key variable of interest. They argue that ethnic exclusion produces violence through two mechanisms. First, it motivates individuals to join insurgencies by creating powerful narratives of grievance and making non-violent methods of winning concessions less efficient than violent methods. Second, it facilitates insurgencies by providing an effective solution to the free-rider problem of mobilization.

Any form of political exclusion can create resentment against the state, but ethnic exclusion does so particularly effectively. The authors argue that, while the psychological mechanism proposed by relative deprivation theory is credible, the measures that are used to establish it empirically are crude. In their view, rather than focusing on inter-personal inequality, we must focus on inter-group inequality, paying close attention to psychology of group membership and identity formation. Horowitz (1985) contends that ethnicity serves as an important identity metric that has profound implications for our self-esteem and estimation of our own well-being. He proposes an extended analogy between the ethnic group and the family, claiming that even low-status individuals receive psychological benefits from being a member of a high-status ethnic group. Therefore, ethnic groups can function as a framing device that create powerful narratives of grievance, and create a significant desire to uphold the status of the group. Thus, if an ethnic group is systematically disenfranchised, individual members will be strongly motivated to address this inequality.

Additionally, exclusion prevents grievances from being addressed through non-violent means. A group that holds grievances against the government is presumably able to rely on its representatives within the government to garner concessions. However, if members of the group have no access to political power of this form, they are left with limited options. The group may choose to work towards gaining a sub-national unit, in an attempt to create a political structure that will guarantee fair representation. However, with a limited ability to pressure the state into adopting new legislation, such efforts are unlikely to succeed. Marginalized groups turn to violent insurgency as it is the most effective method of guaranteeing a government response. Governments may easily ignore protests or petitions, but violent events directly challenge their control over territory. Insurgencies, as a technology of violence, allow excluded groups to prompt this response with a limited amount of resources, given that they do not need to develop the military sophistication needed for a conventional war.

Furthermore, ethnic exclusion aids mobilization, by helping to solve the free-rider problem. Mobilization prompted by inter-personal inequality faces a significant problem. If the goal of violent mobilization is to improve the welfare of the poor generally, then there is little incentive for any poor person in particular to join an insurgent group. While there is a marginal cost to participating in an insurgency there is no marginal benefit. Successful insurgencies will win concessions for the entirety of the demographic that they are organized around, rather than just the fighters who took part. However, failed insurgencies incur particular costs on fighters who risk death or capture by taking part. Therefore, insurgent groups must have powerful mechanisms to ensure that the population does not take advantage of their efforts. As ethnic groups are largely based on kinship and the myth of shared ancestry, they provide a series of close-knit relationships which insurgents can leverage to pressure people to join. Moreover, insurgents can also pressure members of the community not to provide information to the government about their whereabouts or tactics, enabling them to stage a protracted insurgency.

The argument for ethnic exclusion is certainly sound but it fails to provide a full explanation for the outbreak of violence. The outbreak of violence occurs at a defined point in time. Static and long-standing factors cannot explain it as they fail to demonstrate a clear difference between periods of peace and periods of violence. At best, they can demonstrate a susceptibility to violence, which may or may not actually take place. A full explanation for the onset of violence must be dynamic, pointing to a change that triggered an outbreak.

Skocpol (1979) adopts this intuition and attempts to identify processes, rather than static factors that prompt violence. She uses the concept of state crises, defined as sudden degradation of a state’s administrative or military power, to explain violent revolution. In a sense, she makes state capacity dynamic, by acknowledging that it can change over time. Similarly, Huntington (1968) takes a dynamic approach to income inequality, looking at the process of economic modernization. He notes that the benefits of GDP growth are often unevenly distributed, rapidly creating income inequality. In addition, economic modernization tends to be associated with rapid rural-to-urban migration, which ruptures traditional social linkages. New migrants to urban areas are surrounded by the fruits of economic modernization but unable to fully benefit from them. They become a demographic that is primed for rebellion.

However, both adaptations suffer from challenges. Skocpol’s concept of state crises is difficult to test empirically, as it is difficult to operationalize state capacity. Military capacity initially appears easy to measure. The number of soldiers, tanks, planes and other relevant military equipment seems to be a reasonable standard for measuring military capacity (Kocher, 2010). However, insurgencies are designed to subvert the usual process of warfare, to the extent that the relative amount of military resources may be of little importance. The mixed record of American counter-insurgency efforts against relatively weaker opponents in Afghanistan and Iraq serves as proof of this.[[68]](#footnote-68) Until there is consensus on which factors make for a successful counter-insurgency, it is difficult to assess military capacity to carry it out.

Huntington’s argument on income shocks has a certain intuitive logic and is certainly easy to test empirically. However, as Lawrence (2010) points out, the empirical evidence for a link between income shocks and violence is extremely mixed. She analyzes Fearon and Laitin’s dataset, picking out cases in which civil war occurred that include at least four years of data on GDP/capita. She finds that, on average, the level of poverty did not change significantly prior to the onset of violence.

By contrast, severance is both relatively easier to operationalize and better-supported in the literature. I define severance as the process of cutting off a previously empowered ethnic group from political power. Thus, severance is the dynamic equivalent of ethnic exclusion. Political power can easily be operationalized as the number of civil service appointments, legislative representatives or members of the executive branch that stem from a certain ethnic group. Such a measure is clearly imperfect,[[69]](#footnote-69) since political power can also be exercised through informal relationships and the ability to lobby government officials. However, it it provides a clear and reasonable standard. Additionally, Cederman, Gleditsch and Buhaug’s work indicates some empirical support for the importance of severance.[[70]](#footnote-70) While they argue for the primacy of ethnic exclusion as an explanatory variable, they note that ethnic reversals, which they define as the marginalization of a previously powerful ethnic group, are especially likely to result in conflict. Therefore, I argue that severance is the variable that provides the greatest explanatory power, providing a dynamic explanation for the onset of violent that operates through multiple mechanisms.

**Generating Hypotheses**

This section will apply the insights of the literature to the particular case of the Boko Haram insurgency. The majority of the independent variables proposed in the literature are plausible in the Nigerian context. The Lake Chad region in which the insurgency is located is disproportionately poor in comparison with other regions and lacks natural resources. In addition, it has been greatly affected by climate change, creating structural unemployment.[[71]](#footnote-71) This holds true both when our analysis is limited to Nigeria, and when we extend it to other affected countries. Therefore, residents of the region have a low opportunity cost for participating in armed rebellion and a solid basis for grievances against the state. Additionally, there is little to suggest that a dynamic process of creating economic inequality is responsible for the outbreak of violence. Economic modernization has created inequality by making the rest of Nigeria relatively richer than the North-East.[[72]](#footnote-72) However, the mechanism by which it has done so dates back to the 1970’s oil boom, in which investment in the agricultural industry rapidly declined in favor of more lucrative opportunities in the oil industry.[[73]](#footnote-73) The fact that the insurgency is occurring several decades later, during a period in which investment in Northern agriculture has actually begun to rise,[[74]](#footnote-74) suggests that economic inequality does not play a large role.

State capacity is limited in Nigeria, providing a good opportunity structure for violent rebellion. While estimates vary, the population of Borno state is generally regarded as being at least 4 million,[[75]](#footnote-75) providing a very large pool of potential insurgents. The Sambisa forest serves as a major sanctuary for insurgents and has been used by Boko Haram to avoid the presence of the state.[[76]](#footnote-76) Mountain ranges in Northern Cameroon fulfil a similar function,[[77]](#footnote-77) with the added benefit of being inaccessible to the Nigerian military in the initial stages of the insurgency. According to World Bank estimates, Nigeria’s GDP/ capita is a relatively meager $3,203,[[78]](#footnote-78) potentially reflecting the military’s inability to monopolize violence and guarantee security for the local population. Low per capita income may also reflect the lack of infrastructure such as road coverage and access to electricity. These factors make any military operations extremely difficult. Furthermore, there is little evidence to suggest a state crisis. Nigeria’s GDP/ capita has been rising steadily for the past four years, indicating a general improvement rather than a shock in governance.

However, there is strong evidence of ethnic exclusion. Nigerian politics often functions as oligopolistic competition between the three largest ethnic groups, who dominate politics at the federal level. Since ethnicity looms large in Nigeria’s political landscape, parties will generally nominate candidates from large ethnic groups with the expectation that they will deliver the votes of their ethnic group and guarantee victory. For this reason, virtually all of Nigeria’s presidents and vice-presidents since 1998 have been members of the two largest ethnic groups.[[79]](#footnote-79) The sole exception, Goodluck Jonathan, was handpicked for the vice-presidency in the aftermath of a violent insurgency in his home region, the oil-rich Niger Delta. He was elevated to the presidency upon the death of his predecessor.[[80]](#footnote-80) The Kanuri ethnic groups, who constituted the vast majority of Boko Haram’s earliest recruits are a minority tribe, [[81]](#footnote-81) rendering them unable to access the highest level of executive power. The president exercises considerable influence over the distribution of resources, making this an important form of exclusion.[[82]](#footnote-82) Nigeria’s constitution specifies that each ministry, as well as the government as a whole must be constituted in a manner that reflects the federal character.[[83]](#footnote-83) Generally, this is interpreted to mean that public sector jobs should reflect demographic realities rather than merit alone. This constitutional requirement prevents ethnic minorities from balancing the power of ethnic majorities by counteracting their control of the presidency with control over the bureaucracy of the state.

As Boko Haram has grown as an organization, it has diversified ethnically attracting recruits from throughout the North.[[84]](#footnote-84) However, this greater diversity of Boko Haram does not force us to abandon any consideration of ethnicity and its role in framing narratives of grievance. Religion has similarly profound political implications in Nigeria and functions similarly to ethnicity. First, religious identity tends to be passed down and inherited through families much like ethnic identities that rely on a perception of shared ancestry and culture. Second, religious identity is sticky, since conversions are rare and usually invite strong disapproval. Conversions from Islam into other religions are particularly problematic, as they incur formal penalties under sharia law.[[85]](#footnote-85) Third, while not a perfect predictor, religious identity tends to overlap with ethnic identity with Nigeria. The vast majority of ethnic groups are disproportionately populated by members of one religion. Therefore, Boko Haram may still articulate grievances in the sense of the government’s failure to adequately provide for a specific demographic. However, the benefits of ethnicity in compelling local populations to support, or at least not denounce, insurgents are unlikely within this much broader identity category. Social capital within religious groups is less crucial than within ethnic groups.

While these independent variables provide insight into the onset of violence, none seem to suggest a particularly dynamic explanation. Grievances, an opportunity structure that favors insurgency and marginalization have been consistently present for much of the past decade and are common to other potential hotspots in the region that have not erupted into violence. A more sustained analysis of the Boko Haram’s political connections provides our answer. While early members of Boko Haram lacked access to power at the macro level, they held it unambiguously at the micro level. Their alliance with Governor Sheriff and the appointments that he distributed as patronage provided them with access to political power within the state of Borno and consequently, a peaceful method to advance their agenda. Less importantly, engagement and debate with local salafists afforded them a certain legitimacy within their roles on the religious affairs commission, making it more likely that their proposed policies would be enforced. It is only after these alliances were cut off that the group turned to violence. Therefore, the most compelling explanation for the Boko Haram insurgency lies in this act of severance. The sudden inability to access political power is the shock that triggered the insurgency.

**Severance and its Effects**

This section aims to further explore the mechanism by which severance from political power not only prompted a violent trans-national insurgency, but also reinforced it over time. In the absence of a relationship with policy makers, Boko Haram was left with limited options. The state could no longer be used as a vehicle for satisfying its policy preferences and shaping a locality in keeping with its interpretation of salafism. Instead of using the state-level government to create a de facto caliphate, the insurgents chose instead to carve out a separate territory and establish a legal and political structure. Boko Haram’s proposed caliphate can in many ways be viewed as a continuation of the sanctuary that early pilgrims in rural Borno were seeking. Their intimate knowledge of security dynamics within the state endowed them with two advantages. First, they could make accurate assessments of the state’s military capacity, allowing them to strategize appropriately. Second, they could leverage their own experience using violence to manipulate the local population. These two advantages place them in a strong position to mount a full scale insurgency.

An insurgency however, is more than a single violent event. Insurgencies require violence to be sustained over a significant period of time, and to reach a certain scale. Therefore, the task of explaining the occurrence of an insurgency is two-fold; we must explain both the initial outbreak of violence and its spread. We will argue that, in addition to prompting the onset of violence, severance from local patronage networks reinforced violence in three ways. First, it prevented the state from being able to quell violence with political bargaining. Second, it promoted the adoption of a highly exclusionary ideology that legitimated civilian victimisation. Third, it forced Boko Haram to find alternative sources of support, which required violent actions to maintain.

Severance from local networks reinforced insurgent violence by preventing the state from making credible commitments to an amnesty deal. One can see how the initial outbreak of violence, after the death of Mohammed Yusuf, might have been contained by the arrest and sentencing of the officials responsible for his execution, as well as some policy promises. However, the failed allegiance between Governor Sheriff and Boko Haram precluded this possibility. The process of negotiating an amnesty deal can be modelled as a rational choice problem. Typically, amnesty deals require the disarmament and demobilization of insurgent groups in return for some policy promises. Both the government and the insurgent group face a simple binary choice. They may either reject or accept the agreement. If they choose to take the latter option, there is the possibility that the other actor will renege. In the case of Boko Haram and the local government, there is already a history of cheating, making it very difficult for either party to make credible commitments to the amnesty. The consequences of being cheated, from the perspective of the government, are fairly minor as legislation can always be changed. However, the consequences for the insurgent group could be dire. Abandoning their arms leaves them vulnerable to a military assault, which could hamper their ability to mount future challenges against the state. Sheriff’s personal failure to keep his policy promises made the continuation of violence, once it had broken out, virtually certain.

In addition, severance from power-brokers reinforced takfiri ideology. In the initial stages, Boko Haram benefitted from their local alliances, gaining patronage and influence over policy from Governor Sheriff and legitimacy within local religious discourse from salafist organisations. In the absence of these two forms of collaboration, Boko Haram was forced to compete with both parties for control over the local population. Within their ideological framework, the easiest way to assert one’s own legitimacy and call into question the legitimacy of others is to declare them an apostate. Hence, while early sermons of Mohammed Yusuf characterize only very specific instances of corruption and government negligence as un-Islamic, the group’s more recent pronouncements suggest that almost every leadership figure, whether Islamic or affiliated with the secular government, is illegitimate.[[86]](#footnote-86)

Such an exclusionary ideology may explain the massive amounts of civilian casualties, despite the fact that Boko Haram’s proposed caliphate will require a civilian population. The group have demonstrated throughout their history that they are capable of attracting a following within the region. In Weinstein’s (2007) parlance, their initial endowment was social as well as financial, predicated on local support as much as patronage. The belief in a world simply divided into fellow fighters and infidels explains their recent lack of attention to maintaining local support. Infidels would be an unwelcome addition to the caliphate, hence their support holds no import.

Finally, severance from local patronage networks forced Boko Haram to create other forms of revenue, which privileged violent action. Boko Haram received funding from the state apparatus both directly and indirectly. Direct donations were made in exchange for manpower during elections. However, the group also benefitted financially from the government’s policy of turning a blind eye to their criminality. Allegedly, the group partly financed themselves through smuggling, helping to transport small arms and drugs through the Sahel region.[[87]](#footnote-87) After ties were cut, both forms of revenue ceased, especially after the establishment of the civilian militias. Volunteer forces in the region have often been accused of prioritising opportunistic predation over establishing secure neighbourhoods, which likely increases the difficulty and cost of smuggling operations.

To replace these lost forms of revenue, Boko Haram plugged into global jihadist networks to find support, [[88]](#footnote-88) attending training camps in Mali and establishing a heavily-publicised formal alliance with the Islamic State.[[89]](#footnote-89) The latter alliance is particularly notable and its effects are clearly observable in the rapid changes in Boko Haram’s media strategy. The production of ISIS-style beheading videos[[90]](#footnote-90) and the increasing use of Arabic over Kanuri or Hausa[[91]](#footnote-91) is testament to the newly global focus of the movement. Presumably, foreign jihadists will attempt to fund groups with ideologies similar to themselves. In the case of ISIS and regional Al-Qaeda affiliates, this makes spectacular acts of violence potentially very lucrative. The media attention that they attract might help Boko Haram establish a reputation amongst foreign jihadists, making them a more attractive candidate for funding. Foreign sponsors are distanced from the effects of these brutal actions, making them less likely to be wary of indiscriminate violence.

**The Insurgency’s Significance**

The value of our argument rests on the notion that the Boko Haram insurgency is an important political development. If the insurgency itself has a limited impact, then an explanation of its occurrence lacks import. This section will attempt to establish the broader significance of the insurgency and discuss its impact on the region. First, the insurgency is notable simply by virtue of it’s human cost. President Buhari has announced that the insurgency has killed at least 10,000 people over the past 6 years and has argued that the true death toll is almost certainly higher, due to underreporting.[[92]](#footnote-92) 2 million people have been displaced by the conflict across 4 countries,[[93]](#footnote-93) potentially creating resettlement issues in the near future. For survivors who have chosen to remain in affected areas, life has been severely disrupted by the conflict. Attacks on secular schools have forced many public schools to close resulting in years of lost education, and a perpetuation of the same problem of underdevelopment that sparked the insurgency in the first place.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Second, the political consequences are similarly dramatic. Nigeria is Africa’s most populous and wealthiest country, making it a regional hegemon. The insurgency became the major talking point of its 2015 election, and a powerful piece of propaganda for the opposition party. The election of General Muhammadu Buhari is largely based on strength of his counter-insurgency credentials, as both a Northerner and a former high-ranking general. It constituted the first time that a Nigerian opposition party had come into power through peaceful, constitutional elections. Additionally, the increasing trans-nationalism of the insurgency has forced affected countries to work closely on counter-insurgency. Nigeria is only just beginning to flex its muscles as a regional power and the manner in which it pursues relationships with other state may provide some insight into how it will project its influence over the region. The early dynamics of this insurgency are similar to the current conflict between Kenya and Al Shabaab, in the sense that they are both motivated by a marginalized, trans-national ethnic group who have adopted hardline salafist ideologies.[[95]](#footnote-95) Studying this insurgency may develop insights and policy recommendations applicable to that conflict.

Third, aside from human considerations, the insurgency provides rich opportunities for analysis. There is a large body of work analysing terrorism and civil conflict, with a recently developing focus on insurgency. Cases such as the Boko Haram insurgency allow us to put these literatures in conversation with one another. More importantly however, they allow us to investigate a key variation in insurgencies, that of scale. There are currently a number of trans-national insurgencies that began with a firm grounding in local grievances. The Al-Shabaab conflict in Kenya and Somalia, and ongoing ISIS activity within the Levant are probably the two most significant examples. We have little sense of which factors have allowed these groups to expand so rapidly: is their success due to a certain set of qualities, such as strong leadership and a particular kind of internal organisation, or is the political context in which they are placed more important? Investigating the Boko Haram insurgency allows us to add another case to this limited category and get a better sense of what differentiates it from less successful kinds of insurgent groups. Additionally, this project is in keeping with recent efforts to understand the dynamics of violence during a conflict, and pay serious attention to the strategic, contingent decisions that actors make.

Finally, dissecting the Boko Haram insurgency offers insight into the nature of political militias. Staniland (2015) has called for greater study of militias, noting that while they are often treated as pawns of the government, they vary significantly in their relationships to the state. Scholars of violence generally regard state and non-state actors as quite different, attributing different motivations and capabilities to each. The presence of militias who have both collaborated with and competed against the government calls this typology into question. Even militias that do fit the traditional characterisation as a contractor for violence bear interesting implications for the problematic concept of state capacity. How do we evaluate a government who exercises control through the use of militias, given that their relationships may not be consistent over time?

**Conclusion**

I have argued that Boko Haram’s trans-national insurgency is best explained by their severance from political power, tracing how the rupture of their relationships with Borno state power-brokers prompted a turn to violence. Unlike most explanations of the Boko Haram conflict, I prioritize this dynamic factor over structural problems such as ethnic deprivation or the lack of state capacity within Nigeria. My argument bears implications for Nigeria’s counter-insurgency strategy, which is currently faltering due to Boko Haram’s return to guerilla tactics.[[96]](#footnote-96)

First, it is clear that a military strategy alone will not suffice. In the long term, the grievances that motivated early recruits, such as structural unemployment and economic inequality, must be addressed. Statements by senior political figures within the country suggest that the new government recognise that the curbing of corruption, the establishment of stimulus programs, and the provision of basic public goods will prevent further segments of the population from becoming radicalized.[[97]](#footnote-97) In addition, some attention should be paid to the structural problems that the region faces. Economic programs may provide short term relief, but they cannot resuscitate a dying industry. Moving the local population away from Lake-Chad-dependent agriculture will significantly improve their long term prospects.

However, in the short term security must be re-established. Economic programs and projects serve as soft targets for insurgents if they are not properly defended. It is clear that Boko Haram’s current ability to stage an insurgency is dependent on support from global jihadist networks. Defeating the insurgents requires careful scrutiny of their resources, including their international sources of funding. The insurgency is, in a sense, part of a broader conflict and the government should take advantage of the connections between Boko Haram and other insurgents to solicit assistance from the international community. In terms of their alliances, Nigeria should pay close attention to the efforts against Al Qaeda affiliates in Mali, Al Shabaab and ISIS. The African Union security architecture already provides a structure that should facilitate intelligence sharing relevant to the first two, but it has been relatively underused.

The open border policy of the Lake Chad Basin should also be reconsidered.[[98]](#footnote-98) In theory, the policy is intended to facilitate free trade and contribute to the prosperity of all four nations. In reality, a significant proportion of the trade passing through the area is illicit. Arms, drugs and human trafficking are common within the area.[[99]](#footnote-99) Open borders prevent national governments from registering and recording movement across the border that might help them to identify financiers or key supporters of the group. The hidden benefit of the trafficking problem is that there is a large set of nations that are negatively affected by it and are incentivised to invest resources in improving it. The majority of human and drug trafficking in the region is bound for Europe, a problem which the European Union have chosen to fend off by paying North African transit nations in return for tightening their borders.[[100]](#footnote-100) Arms trafficking often facilitates the kidnapping of Europeans expats and tourists in the region, forcing European governments to pay large ransoms to recover their citizens.[[101]](#footnote-101) Seeking partnerships with EU countries, if only at the superficial level of soliciting aid specifically for border security might improve the situation.

I have argued that severance from local power brokers was a major trigger for the insurgency. At first glance, reintegration is the most obvious solution. However, there are challenges that make this difficult. First, the nature of Boko Haram’s ideology makes it difficult to channel their concerns through the democratic process. A disavowal of the principle of secularism cuts at the very heart of Nigeria’s constitutionally-enshrined founding principles. However, splits have already formed within Boko Haram over ideological objections to the use of violence, particularly when it is not defensive in nature and is targeted towards Muslims. Reintegration efforts could be directed towards this more moderate wing of the organisation as well as non-combatants within the Lake Chad Basin. Ideally, gaining the support of the former would encourage defections, while gaining the support of the latter would allow the governments to leverage local knowledge for counter-insurgent strategy. A good first step for re-establishing trust with these actors would be to investigate the extensive allegations of war crimes by the Nigerian Army.[[102]](#footnote-102) Guilty parties should be prosecuted, and have their sentences publicised amongst the community.

Second, the nature of the previous relationship with the state makes any interactions between them charged and potentially unstable. An unexpected trigger could easily recreate previous dynamics and provoke renewed violence. For this reason, the civilian joint task force (CJTF) should be formally incorporated into the Nigerian army and receive training. Currently, the CJTF receive arms from the Nigerian government and are allocated areas to patrol but are not formally monitored.[[103]](#footnote-103) Therefore, they are effectively a state-sponsored militia. Their work may actually compromise government efforts to win the support of the local population. Human rights abuses perpetrated by them may be attributed to the army, making them unpopular in the local community. In addition, revenge attacks staged by Boko Haram in CJTF-controlled areas might reinforce the perception that the army are unable to guarantee security. To win hearts and minds, all actors fighting Boko Haram should operate with a coordinated strategy and uniform rules of engagement.

Finally, to guarantee and institutionalize greater access to political power, local governments should receive an increased share of federal revenue and more discretion over how to use it. Devolution is a consistently popular policy in Nigeria, as evinced by the most recent National Conference which fielded several requests to create new states and place more power at the state level.[[104]](#footnote-104) In general, citizens favour devolution because it creates a significant number of public sector jobs and presumably guarantees better ethnic representation. Creating new states is often costly and inefficient, but the positive representational effects of this policy could be achieved by giving local governments more power. The average citizen is far more likely to be able to establish personal relationships with administrators in their local government area than in their state capital. These relationships can have a positive effect on governance. Both parties can pressure each other to uphold their end of the social contract, ensuring public goods are provided and tax is collected. Citizens are also far more likely to participate in decision-making at the local level, since they will be directly affected by every decision.

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