Causes of Terrorism in Nigeria

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CAUSES OF TERRORISM IN NIGERIA

Abstract

This paper will explore the current state of Nigeria and particularly the ways in which the state of Nigeria permits and causes terrorism such as that of Boko Haram and the oil terrorism in the Niger Delta. It will discuss both the corruption of the Nigerian government and the various empirical causes of terrorism. It will connect this corruption to the causes of terrorism and ultimately deduce that the corruption of the nation's government is the root cause of both Boko Haram and Niger Delta terrorism.

Literature Review

I.S. Popoola defines terrorism as "the use of violent action in order to achieve political action or to force a government to act (Popoola, 2012). Terrorist groups, according to this definition, have existed in Nigeria for decades. This paper will focus on two separate terrorist movements in Nigeria—Boko Haram and the "oil terrorism" in the Niger Delta region. Boko Haram, whose name means "western education is forbidden," is an Islamist militant group (Popoola, 2012). By contrast, the Niger Delta terrorism is fueled by economic and oppression (Omojimite, 2011).

From 1808 to 1903, Northern Nigeria was part of a Muslim empire known as the Sokoto Caliphate. This empire instituted Sharia Law, which helped to unify the region, eliminate corruption, and create prosperity for Muslims. In 1903, this caliphate became a British colony, and the Muslim Northern Nigeria was combined with a Christian Southern Nigeria into one secular nation, consisting of 350 ethnic groups which spoke 250 different languages, leading to sectionalism as well as ethnic and religious tensions (Thomson, 2012).
In the 1980s, a series of religious uprisings took place. This became known as the Maitatsine movement. Members of this movement were angered by the weak and inconsistent enforcement of Sharia Law in the nation. They responded to this issue by advocating the murder and harassment of anyone they believed was not conducting himself according to a strict interpretation of Sharia Law. From this movement, a group called the Shabaab Muslim Youth Organization developed in 1995. A.I. Ajayi, in his 2012 article "'Boko Haram' and Terrorism in Nigeria: Exploratory and Explanatory Notes," argues that this group evolved into Boko Haram around 2000 (Ajayi, 2012). While Ajayi asserts that the objectives of Boko Haram are consistent with the Maitatsine advocacy for the killings of those who do not strictly follow Sharia Law, Michael A. Peters, in "'Western Education is Sinful': Boko Haram and the Abduction of Chibok Schoolgirls," argues that the goals of Boko Haram are a bit different from that. Peters asserts that Boko Haram's goals are consistent with Muhammad Yusuf's goal of prohibiting all western education (Peters, 2014). Either way, the group's basic purpose is to spread an extreme Islamic message and Sharia Law, whether through killings or strictly Islamic education.

Unlike in the Sokoto Caliphate, in today's Nigeria, corruption has become a major issue. Nigeria has been consistently identified by numerous studies as one of the most corrupt countries in the world. Since 1996, Nigeria has been named the most corrupt nation in the world three times. In the 1996 Study of Corruption by Transparency International, Nigeria was ranked the most corrupt nation among the 54 nations considered. In "Corruption and Economic Growth in Nigeria: An Empirical Analysis 1996-2013," Oyegun Gbenga argues that widespread poverty, weakness of social and governmental enforcement mechanism, and inequality in the distribution of wealth are major effects of corruption in Nigeria (Gbenga, 2015). Similarly, in the 2008 article...
"Nigeria and the Threats of Terrorism: Myth or Reality," Sarafa Ogundiya and Jimoh Amzat argue that economic imbalances and absence of an effective security system are not only effects of corruption in Nigeria, but are also causes of terrorism there (Ogundiya & Amzat, 2008).

Both widespread poverty and economic imbalances exist in Nigeria, as 72% of the Northern population, 35% of the Niger Delta population, and 27% of the southern population live below the poverty line. This constitutes an economic imbalance not only in the various regions of Nigeria, but also in the religions there as the North is made up mainly of Muslims, while the South is primarily Christian (Brinkel & Ait-Hida, 2012).

Additionally, there is economic imbalance within the Niger Delta region itself, where the oil multinationals gain wealth while destroying the habitat of the Niger Delta people. The oil companies pollute the Niger Delta region to a point where it is difficult off the people to grow the plants upon which they rely for survival. While the people suffer, the oil companies thrive, creating a large economic imbalance between the rich oil companies and the poor Niger Delta people even within a single region (Obi, 1997). Although the Ogonis and Ijaws of the Niger Delta have been discriminated against for decades, the region was relatively peaceful prior to the entrance of the oil multinationals. Today, however, the Niger Delta region has become a breeding ground for terrorist activity, and the Ogonis and Ijaws frequently make attacks on the oil pipelines in the region (Omojimite, 2011).

In addition, the government's enforcement of anti-terrorism laws is notoriously weak. The majority of Nigeria's attempts to enforce laws against terrorism have been entirely ineffective, and as a result, terrorism in the region continues to grow due to the government's failure to address the groups' grievances and the subsequent recruitment of new members (Blanquart,
In fact, a number of leaders in Northern Nigeria have refused to openly condemn the activities of Boko Haram (Popoola, 2012).

The effects of corruption and the causes of terrorism in Nigeria are essentially the same. Therefore this paper will argue that the ultimate cause of terrorism in Nigeria is government corruption. In the past, much of what is today Nigeria had prosperity under Sharia Law in the Sokoto Caliphate, which has led some to believe that the key to combatting corruption and creating prosperity in Nigeria is the strict institution and enforcement of Sharia Law across the entirety of Nigeria. Others see the source of their problems as the oil multinationals. All of these groups, however, have turned to terrorism in order to combat the issues caused by the corruption of the Nigerian government.

Introduction

On April 14, 2014, 276 female students were kidnapped from a boarding school in the northern Nigerian town of Chibok by a terrorist group known as Boko Haram (Peters, 2014). This incident, although one of the first to cause international outcry, was only one of many attacks by this group, whose terrorist activities have been expanding progressively since 2009 (Ajayi, 2012). In addition, there is terrorism in Nigeria that is separate from Boko Haram, such as the "oil terrorism" in the Niger Delta region. (Ogundiyi & Amzat, 2008). These different terrorist groups all have essentially the same root cause: the corruption of the Nigerian government.

One of the primary empirical causes of terrorism is a government's failure to provide basic services (Brinkel & Ait-Hida, 2012). This can be seen as one of the results of corruption
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and causes of terrorism in Nigeria. Nigeria is the largest oil producer in Africa and the twelfth largest in the world. Despite this, 72% of Nigeria's Muslim North, 27% of its Christian South, and 35% of its Niger Delta region live below the poverty line. Additionally, social services, public safety programs, and education are of poor quality and, at times, are nonexistent. For many Nigerians, there is no continuous access to safe drinking water, shelter, or employment. Life expectancy in Nigeria is less than 47 years. The cause of these poor conditions is the fact that the oil wealth flows directly to the Nigerian elite, who keep the money for their personal gain, leaving the majority of the Nigerian people in poverty. This corruption and poverty leaves Nigerians looking for a way to find prosperity. From 1808 to 1903, Northern Nigeria was part of the Sokoto Caliphate, an Islamic empire under Sharia Law. In the Sokoto Caliphate, the people were united and prosperous, and corruption was rejected (Thomson, 2012). Thus, under the Nigerian state, where corruption prevails and the majority of the Muslim North lives in poverty, some radicals wish to return to a state such as the Sokoto Caliphate, and so they seek a strict interpretation of Sharia Law over the entirety of Nigeria in the hope of regaining the prosperity of the Muslims in the Sokoto Caliphate. These radicals then radicalize other Muslims, particularly targeting "disaffected youth, unemployed university students, and street children (Blanquart, 2012)." Therefore, these radicals turn to terrorism in an effort to return to the prosperity previously found in the Sokoto Caliphate which has largely eluded Muslims in Nigeria. Additionally, in the Niger Delta, the Nigerian communities who host the oil multinationals from which Nigeria gains its revenue suffer from the pollution and environmental degradation caused by the oil production. The Nigerian government and the oil multinationals refuse to provide compensation, a safe environment, or a share of oil rents to the host
communities because the state and its ruling elites want to keep the oil profits for themselves, and the multinationals want to produce their oil as cheaply as possible so they can make more money (Obi, 1997). As a result of this corrupt partnership, host communities are forced to turn to violent upsurge, pipeline vandalism, and other methods which are defined as "oil terrorism" by the Nigerian government in order to have their grievances heard (Ogundiya & Amzat, 2008). Thus, Nigeria's corrupt partnership with oil multinationals and choice to keep money among the wealthy instead of providing basic services for its citizens, forces the citizens to look elsewhere for basic needs, leading many of them to turn to terrorism.

Another factor that enables terrorism is "weak political will in terms of government's inability or unwillingness to prevent terrorism and absence of an effective security system (Ogundiya & Amzat, 2008)." In Northern Nigeria, leaders have refused to openly condemn Boko Haram's activities. Whether this is due to fear of retaliatory attacks or because these leaders support the group, it is worsening the situation and limiting the forthcoming foreign aid (Popoola, 2012). In addition to this unwillingness to prevent terrorism by condemning Boko Haram's actions, Nigeria also lacks an effective security system. In fact, reports by the World Bank and Transparency International 2007 identified the Nigerian police as the single most corrupt institution in the country, which has consistently ranked among the most corrupt countries in the world. The Nigerian police frequently engage in roadside bribery, where drivers are pulled over at checkpoints and allowed to go free for a bribe (Gbenga, 2015). This police corruption and acceptance of bribes likely also extends to allowing members of Boko Haram to go free for a bribe. Therefore, the corruption of the Nigerian government has clearly led to a weak and ineffective security force which allows Boko Haram to grow.
A final factor that leads to terrorism is a majority discrimination against a certain ethnic group (Ogundiya & Amzat, 2008). This can be seen in the discrimination against the Ogonis and Ijaws in the Niger Delta region. These groups have been discriminated against in the Niger Delta for decades. Until fairly recently, Niger Delta people were forbidden from holding certain political offices, including the President and Vice President positions. This discrimination has led to a sense of unity through shared deprivation among the Niger Delta people, which has helped to radicalize and mobilize them (Omojimite, 2011). This is a result of the corruption of the government, which seeks to keep the Niger Delta people down and politically powerless so that oil revenues remain high and remain in the hands of the elite Yorubas and Ibos. Because the Niger Delta people are unable to have their demands heard through the democratic system, they turn to terrorism to make their grievances impossible to ignore. If the Niger Delta people were not oppressed, there likely would not be much terrorism in the region, as they would then be able to make progress through the legal system instead of being forced to turn to violent alternative methods. The government's corrupt partnership with the oil multinationals has caused discrimination against the Ogonis and Ijaws, who are viewed merely as obstacles to oil profits, and this view has lead the Niger Delta people to desperation and terrorism.

Empirical causes of terrorism include a government's failure to provide basic services, minimal or ineffective efforts to combat terrorism, and discrimination against minority ethnic groups. These three things are all present in Nigeria and are all the result of the corruption that plagues the nation. If Nigeria wishes to eliminate the terrorism that threatens its stability, Nigeria must begin by improving conditions, particularly those in the North and the Niger Delta, through the elimination of corruption. This will attack the root of the problem and encourage would-be
terrorists to use the democratic system rather than terrorism to make change, and, thus, the level of terrorism in the nation would decrease drastically.
References


