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EXTREMISM AS A RESPONSE TO GLOBALIZATION

CASE STUDY: NIGERIA

By Quinn Johnson

INTRODUCTION

In this era of globalization, relationships between institutions, organizations, and individuals have achieved unprecedented connectivity worldwide. While producing both positive and negative outcomes, the vast majority of these interactions are nonviolent in nature. In some cases, however, the impacts of globalization colliding with traditional cultures and their values have resulted in violent extremism. While such extremism can be observed in many different states worldwide, Nigeria presents a particularly interesting case.

Though vastly different in character, two ongoing conflicts in Nigeria, the Boko Haram Insurgency and the Niger Delta Conflict, can both be considered responses to certain aspects of globalization. Using the Method of Agreement to find commonalities which may contribute to understanding broader trends, this paper will examine extremism as a backlash against globalization, a framework developed by Australian military strategist and counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen in his book *The Accidental Guerilla*.¹

As explained by Kilcullen, negative response to the cultural, economic, and political dominance of Western ideals and values is a unifying thread between many disparate extremist groups and conflicts worldwide and, indeed, is

an organizing principle for many of them.² In addition, the wildly uneven economic effects of globalization have created international classes of haves and have-nots. The have-nots are disenfranchised and are, thanks to globalized news media, fully aware of the luxurious lives that the emerging class of global elites enjoy at their expense. As a result, there is a strong tendency to blame this condition—often not incorrectly—on the economic forces of globalization which are inextricably linked to the West.³ While Kilcullen's model is certainly not a comprehensive theory for analyzing every extremist group, it does provide a useful framework for evaluating whether an actor's behavior can be explained by the economic and cultural impacts of Western-led globalization on their immediate environment.

BOKO HARAM

The most infamous extremism associated with Nigeria is the terrorist group Boko Haram. Their name roughly translates to “Western Education is Forbidden” as their ideology objects to the influence of Western secular values on Nigeria which the extremist group seeks to replace with radical Islamic theocracy under Sharia law. Founded in 2002 as a nonviolent religious movement, Boko Haram evolved into a violent insurgency after an initial clash with state security forces in 2009, a conflict which resulted in their founder, Mohammed Yusuf, being arrested and publicly executed by the Nigerian Police. The group rose to international attention in 2014 following their kidnapping of 276 Nigerian schoolgirls from the village of Chibok, with the resulting viral “Bring Back Our Girls” campaign making Boko Haram a household name in the West.³

The motivations and goals of Boko Haram are best understood by examining the impact of globalization on Nigerian demographics. In Nigeria, there is a rough parity between the Christian (49.3%) and Muslim (48.8%) populations, although the presence of syncretism with indigenous religions creates a significant margin of error.⁵ Since 1953, the country’s religious factions have experienced sporadic violence, with religious identities being a significant factor in the infamous Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970) over Biafran secession.⁶ The predominantly Christian south contains the most economically prosperous regions, including the megacity Lagos (the city with the highest GDP in Africa) and the oil-rich Niger Delta. Conversely, the primarily Muslim north, where Boko Haram is based, has not benefited nearly as much from the economic development brought about by globalization.⁷ Despite Nigeria’s status as Africa’s largest economy, around 44% of its 198 million inhabitants live in extreme poverty, leading it to surpass India for the dubious distinction of country with the most extremely poor people.⁸ This unequal development

GLOBALIZATION:

Globalization refers to the growing interdependence of the world’s economies, cultures, and populations, brought about by cross-border trade in goods and services, technology, and flows of investment, people, and information (Peterson Institute for International Economics).

METHOD OF AGREEMENT:

A method of scientific induction devised by J. S. Mill according to which if two or more instances of a phenomenon under investigation have only a single circumstance in common the circumstance in which all the instances agree is the cause or effect of the phenomenon (Miriam-Webster).

SHARIA LAW:

The religious law of Islam is seen as the expression of God’s command for Muslims and, in application, constitutes a system of duties that are incumbent upon all Muslims by virtue of their religious belief (Encyclopedia Britannica).

THE WEST:

The West refers to Euro-America, including Mexico and Canada.

NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR:

Fleeing religious persecution, the Christian Igbo ethnic group established the secessionist Republic of Biafra, consisting of 9 southeast Nigerian States, in 1967. The subsequent 3-year war led to a famine that killed one million Biafrans before Nigeria claimed victory and reunited the country in 1970 (History).

GDP:

GDP (Gross Domestic Product) is the monetary value of all the finished goods and services produced within a country’s borders in a specific time period (Investopedia).

has created deep resentment within the country, especially to the extent that it reinforces and inflames existing religious tensions within the population.

Boko Haram believe that the unequal economic development has empowered the country's Christians at the expense of the Muslims, who were historically the more powerful faction. As a result of this shifting power balance, the Christians have been able to implement conditions such as Western-style co-ed education which Boko Haram, because of their extremist interpretation of Islamic ideology, see as intolerable. It is perhaps not coincidental that Boko Haram's most powerful years (2010–2015) coincided with the presidential term of Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from the south.⁹

Here, it is important to note that efforts to implement Western-style education in northern Nigeria have continued under both Muslim and Christian regimes. Boko Haram does not accurately represent the views of an entire religious community or geographic region; the fact that the infamous schoolgirl kidnapping happened in Chibok, a village deep within their power base in northeast Nigeria, clearly illustrates this. Still, Boko Haram's hatred of Western education, providing both their name and organizing principle, has exponentially intensified Nigeria's continuing cycle of religious violence.

Uneven economic development and ongoing religious tension do not explain why the Nigerian government continues pushing for girls' education

in remote areas which are both highly opposed to the idea and difficult to govern. Why will the government not simply concede the point and grant the region greater autonomy in order to end the violence? An answer may lie in the funding that has financed Nigeria's economic development. As of 2018, the Nigerian government owes \$18.9 billion to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) alone.¹⁰ The IMF lists quality education and gender equality as two of its seventeen Sustainable Development Goals, adopted from the UN.¹¹ The amount of financial leverage the IMF holds over Nigeria doubtlessly allows them a voice in how that money is spent domestically, in addition to any loan conditionalities.

Regardless of domestic support for women's education, to some people the mere existence of this relationship means any progress in the field of education will be irreparably tainted by Western influence. Combined with an extremist view of Islam which denies women many rights, this has proven to be a persuasive ideology. If Boko Haram want to gain support, they have two equally viable paths: religious and economic. To the millions of poor Muslims living in northern Nigeria, seeing the Christians in the south gaining wealth and imposing heavy-handed policies from afar can create significant resentment and anger. Such resentment results in a huge pool of candidates for potential radicalization and recruitment. Indeed, the success of Boko Haram's ten-year insurgency, still showing no sign of

abating, is testament to how powerfully their message resonates within an environment of longstanding religious tensions, unequal wealth distribution, and international-led development.

CONFLICT IN THE NIGER DELTA

The ongoing conflict in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, variable in intensity but fairly constant since the late 1990s, revolves around control of the region's extensive oil deposits. As Africa's largest oil producer, Nigeria's economy is dominated by petrodollars: 92% of their foreign exchange earnings come from oil, for a total of \$340 billion annually.¹² 90% of this oil is extracted from the Niger Delta, making it the center of an incredibly lucrative industry.¹³ However, widespread inequality is present even within the generally more affluent regions of the Delta, with 70% of the population living on less than a dollar a day.¹⁴ In addition, this densely populated region (265 people/km²) is home to roughly 30 million people from over 40 different ethnic groups speaking more than 100 languages.¹⁵

When oil giants, Royal Dutch Shell and Chevron, began investing extensively in oil extraction in the Niger Delta during the 1970s and 80s, they relied on their government partners to acquire land for them to operate on, usually without residents' consent or adequate compensation. In response, the Ogoni ethnic group started the nonviolent Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) in 1990 to protest the appropriation and

exploitation of their land. In spite of violent suppression by Nigeria's security forces, MOSOP remained peaceful until 1995 when, with the cooperation of Shell, the then-current military *junta* regime framed and executed its top leadership. MOSOP leader Ken Saro-Wiwa's last words before he was hanged were "You can kill the messenger, but you cannot kill the message," a warning that time has since proven prophetic.¹⁶

While the Ogoni were by far the most prominent ethnic group speaking out against the oil industry's oppression, they were not the only ones: the Ijaws, Itserikis, Urhobos, Isikos, Liages, Ikwerres, Ekpeyes, and Ogulaghas all objected to the ongoing status quo of oil production.¹⁷ The Niger Delta wetlands, their ancestral home as well as a vibrant ecosystem with incredible biodiversity, had been devastated by the negative environmental externalities of oil drilling. Polluted water, damaged habitat, and reduced fish stocks were common symptoms of this degradation.¹⁸ Furthermore, despite the massive profits reaped by the oil companies and the Nigerian government, very little wealth had entered local communities. After the initial government crackdown, armed militias began to form in the Delta, often along tribal lines. These militias funded themselves by stealing oil from pipelines to sell on the open market, kidnapping oil industry workers for ransom, and committing piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. They fought not only government security forces but other militias as well, usually over control of oil profits. However, as oil companies are well versed in operating under hostile conditions, this situation was considered neither unusual nor unacceptable and the conflict remained low-intensity.¹⁹

The emergence of the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) in 2006 represented a radical break from these trends. Operating more like a traditional terrorist network, MEND utilized numerous independent cells and sophisticated tactics along with equipment like speedboats, body armor, and RPGs. Rather than simply raiding the oil industry for money or trying to get them off of tribal lands, MEND wanted to completely eliminate foreign presence in the industry by any means necessary. Any target related to the oil industry was considered fair game.

MEND began attacking offshore platforms and facilities and killing, instead of ransoming, kidnapped workers. These terror tactics made a significant impact, costing the government billions of dollars in lost oil revenue and forcing them to come to the negotiating table after a military solution to the problem proved to be impossible. MEND eventually ceased operations in 2009, after the government agreed to pay them millions of dollars, grant them amnesty, and release their leader and founder, Henry Okah, from prison.¹⁰

The 2010 election of Goodluck Jonathan, the Christian president despised by Boko Haram, signaled a *detente* in the conflict. Hailing from the Niger Delta, Jonathan was considered more sympathetic to the Delta residents than previous administrations. However, the subsequent 2015 election of northern Muslim Muhammadu Buhari, a former *junta* leader, signaled a worsening of relations, in part due to rumors that he planned to scrap the amnesty agreement with MEND. This led to the most recent phase of the conflict in 2016, when the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA), a new player, emerged. With the same goals and tactics as MEND, NDA was extremely successful; Nigeria's oil exports hit a 25-year low in 2016, primarily due to infrastructure damage to the industry. Recently, more insurgent groups have emerged with goals that include the restoration of Biafra, the former secessionist state which encompasses most of the Niger Delta region. The current insurgency, much like Boko Haram, shows no sign of abating.²¹

WHAT ROLE DOES GLOBALIZATION PLAY?

Both of these ongoing conflicts are united by their status as ideological backlashes to the impacts of globalization. Boko Haram is associated with both cultural globalization and economic globalization, while the Niger Delta Conflict is primarily associated with economic globalization.

Boko Haram is strictly defined, both within their own ideology and within popular consciousness, by one thing only: Western education is forbidden. It is revealing that they chose *Western* education and not *Women's* education. Although Boko Haram's tactics certainly involve denying women access to education, their overall strategy is concerned with the influence of the West who they see as the

enablers for the imposition of such intolerable conditions. Perhaps the Nigerian government would have chosen to fight for women's education of its own accord, but, due to the pervasive influence of foreign benefactors, it is impossible to ascertain who did or did not have a role in making specific policies.

This ambiguity lends itself well to Boko Haram's ideology and propaganda. The imposition of modern cultural norms such as women's right to education becomes seen as an intrusion of the hostile West—the same malevolent force which has enriched and empowered the opposite religious faction at the expense of poor Muslims in northern Nigeria. On the other side of the issue, those in the West who see women's education in Nigeria as a moral imperative and condemn attempts to halt its spread are guilty of moral universalism. Moral universalism occurs when individuals or groups assume their specific moral beliefs or societal norms are the "right" ones and are widely shared.

The Niger Delta Conflict is also defined by a single issue: oil. The extraction of Nigeria's oil by foreign firms for sale in international markets is an excellent example of economic globalization, as it involves transnational movement of personnel, currency, and raw materials; foreign direct investment; and governmental cooperation with multinational corporations. The Niger Delta residents feel that the influence of Nigeria's oil industry and its foreign actors has marginalized their own voices and concerns. Westerners

are making decisions in distant boardrooms about what happens on Nigerian soil, expecting the Nigerian government to enforce whatever policies they decide will be most advantageous to their shareholders. This chips away at the government's sovereignty, even if they are a willing partner.

Indeed, since Nigeria's economy depends on oil profits, the government has taken a very proactive role in promoting interests of the oil industry. The violent suppression of the nonviolent movements in the 1990s, as opposed to the peace talks employed once the insurgency became effective at creating significant financial losses, indicates that the revenue streams of the oil industry are a more powerful motivating factor for policy than the rights and opinions of their own citizens.

The emergence of MEND and the move from a greed-based to grievance-based model of fighting clearly reflected a shift in the primary goal of the conflict following the events of the previous decade. What started as a peaceful movement for greater localized control of oil extraction had become a violent and well-organized insurgency that would settle for nothing less than the complete removal of exploitative foreign firms from the oil industry. By allowing the demands of foreign actors to guide domestic policy, the Nigerian government has created generations of bitter enemies, destabilized their already tenuous security situation, inflicted incalculable environmental damage, and suffered significant loss of autonomy. The ongoing

insurgency and revived idea of Biafran independence now present a threat to Nigeria's territorial sovereignty; a threat which could have been avoided through better governance and inclusive institutions.

CONCLUSION

One by-product of Nigeria's economic growth in recent decades has been a backlash to the unequal development deepening divisions within the country. Extremist movements like Boko Haram and the NDA, despite their violent and abhorrent methods, are attempting to address legitimate grievances brought about by the complex and asymmetric interactions between Western-led economic development and Nigeria's socioeconomic environment. Given the patterns seen in the past several decades, it may be impossible for the processes of globalization to occur without a certain amount of violent pushback.

However, this pushback does not mean that nothing can be done to mitigate such conflicts. Boko Haram is a vexing problem to solve; they have a very narrow ideological goal which is not supported by public opinion, and they are unlikely to negotiate on it. Effective counterinsurgency is the most likely path to improving the situation, paired with inclusive economic initiatives to reduce the income disparity between Nigerian Muslims and Christians and thereby defuse religious tensions. However, in the case of the Niger Delta conflict, it is entirely conceivable that multilateral negotiations between

MNCs:

Multi-National Corporation

DEVELOPING COUNTRIES:

Developing countries is a technical term in political science denoting a country in which a large share of the population cannot meet or experiences great difficulties in meeting basic material needs such as housing, food, water, health care, education, electricity, transport, communications, and physical security (Shaping the Developing World by Andy Baker).

IOs:

International Organization

NGOs:

Non-Governmental Organization

the oil companies, the government, and the residents could produce some positive results. The emergence of more hardline groups like MEND and NDA is relatively recent; for decades, all the citizens of the Niger Delta wanted was to have a voice in how the natural resources of their homeland were extracted and how the profits were distributed.

Four key trends and recommendations stand out from analyzing these two conflicts using the Method of Agreement. First, states should be willing to peacefully negotiate on domestic issues caused by globalization *before* violence breaks out, not afterwards. Second, MNCs must be more aware of and more responsive to how their actions impact domestic politics in **developing countries**. Third, IOs and NGOs must acknowledge that progressive development policies will often be met with pushback, and some

of this pushback will inevitably be violent. Finally, and most importantly, improving economic prospects for the Nigerians at risk of being radicalized will improve security prospects immensely. While there will always be a minority of insurgents who fight for ideological reasons, the majority of people (specifically, unemployed young men) who join insurgencies do so because they have no job prospects and therefore no chances for acquiring wealth and a better life. Better economic conditions will reduce the pool of people available for radicalization while giving the state additional tax revenue to combat the reduced insurgents that remain.

While well-entrenched, well-motivated insurgencies may seem like they will never be defeated, recent history has shown this is not the case. ISIS (The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) lost their Caliphate. FARC (The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Columbia) disarmed and became a legitimate political party. As more people find their traditional lifestyles and livelihoods threatened by globalization, there will doubtlessly be more extremist groups seeking to exploit these conditions for their own purposes. In order to successfully address this threat, it is imperative for actors at every level of the economy to take steps to reduce the appeal of extremist ideology. Governments of developing countries need to establish strong and fair institutions to address the many legitimate grievances globalization and economic development cause. Citizens must continue to organize, make their voices heard peacefully, and reject any ideology, no matter how righteous, that includes violence. Finally, MNCs must understand that sustainable, equitable, and inclusive development will create long-term benefits for all actors involved. How many more barrels of oil would Shell be exporting from Nigeria right now if they had worked with the Ogoni People, instead of against them, in developing the Niger Delta oil fields? How many more Shell employees and Delta residents would still be alive? While there is no universal solution to the manifold challenges that globalization presents, switching from a short-term to a long-term view of economic development, and including all stakeholders in negotiations as fully empowered parties, will help insure that growth becomes more equitable, sustainable, and reduces the appeal of extremist ideology.

FOOTNOTES

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