Combating Terrorism: Socioeconomic Issues, Boko Haram, and Insecurity in the North-East Region of Nigeria

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The discourse on the root causes of the Boko Haram domestic terrorism group rages on in Nigeria, as extremists continue to lure destitute militants to their cause. Counter-terrorism needs to focus its efforts on eradicating the breeding grounds for these impoverished sympathizers. A new strategy and a new method should be adopted to prevent the threat of domestic terrorism. Fighting domestic terrorism with human development, specifically social and economic development, should emerge as a new public narrative and long-term objective as part of strategic efforts to counter-terrorism. This paper is an attempt to explore the possible linkage between domestic terrorism and the socioeconomic situation in the North-East region of Nigeria. It examines the possible links between poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, health, and the growth of domestic terrorism.

Keywords: Boko Haram, counter-terrorism, domestic terrorism, North-East region, Nigeria

Introduction

Nigerian policymakers, analysts, and academics have been engaged in a national and international discourse on the underlying causes of the Boko Haram domestic terrorist group in the North-East region of Nigeria ever since the cataclysmic Boko Haram domestic terrorist attacks of 2009. Broadly speaking, two schools of thoughts have emerged. In one school of

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thought, the center-left maintains that the struggle against the root causes of domestic terrorism should prioritize social and economic development. Inspired by both contemporary theory and modernization theory, this school of thought sees social and economic development as the precursor of democratization. It also considers educational and economic empowerment as the best antidote against domestic terrorist recruitment. Since poverty often creates a breeding ground for domestic terrorism, socioeconomic development appears compelling as an effective panacea. This correlation between socioeconomic deprivation and domestic terrorism is strongly rejected by the second school of thought. Using simple logic, this school asserts that most domestic terrorists are neither poor nor uneducated. In fact, the majority seem to come from middle class, ordinary backgrounds. Domestic terrorism is therefore perceived almost exclusively as a "security threat" without any discernible socioeconomic roots or links to relative deprivation. Not surprisingly, this second schools of thought defines the fight against domestic terrorism with a single-minded focus on state actors, jihadist ideology, counter-intelligence, and coercive action.[1]

Both schools of thought make valid points; yet, they also share important shortcomings. The root causes of domestic terrorism are extremely complex, multifaceted, and often intertwined. They resist simplification and easy categorization. Therefore, it should be stated from the outset that there is no unique panacea or simple formula to eradicate domestic terrorism. In the absence of "one size fits all" measures, only a long-term, multipronged strategy aimed at strengthening the institutional underpinnings of development, democracy, and security will achieve effective results. Such a strategy should take into consideration the tension between the two schools outlined above. This article argues that the best way to bridge the important gap between the "development first" school and the "security first" school is to drop the notion of a "war against terror" in favor of a strategic campaign against Boko Haram's domestic terrorism. The tools with which to engage this long-term campaign will come to us by focusing on human development – not just economic growth – in a country where political, economic, and social conditions foment violence. In short, fighting domestic terrorism with human development should emerge as a new public narrative and long-term objective of strategically countering terrorism.

Prioritizing Socioeconomic Issues rather than Domestic Terrorism

Domestic terrorism has multiple causes. Attempts to create a single typology of domestic terrorism or generic profiles for Boko Haram terrorists are often misleading. An ideal breeding ground for recruitment emerges when various social, cultural, economic, political, and psychological factors come together; and even when such negative dynamics converge, different terrorist networks have varying political objectives. Despite such complexities and diversity, all domestic terrorist groups share one common objective: the willingness to kill or harm civilians for their cause. This is why domestic terrorism is ultimately a major security concern.

Therefore, there is no point in denying that counter-terrorism is primarily about securing the homeland and protecting unarmed civilians with utmost vigilance, applying safety measures, intelligence gathering, law enforcement, interagency coordination, and the use of force when necessary. The Boko Haram domestic terrorist group would not be deterred by anything less than the strongest security measures. The national debate about the root causes of Boko Haram's domestic terrorism, however, is not about foreign intervention or heavily armed military counter-terrorism. Advocates of this approach are interested in fighting the conditions that create Boko Haram's domestic terrorism, and not the Boko Haram terrorists themselves. This is why the case for social and economic development in the northern states of Nigeria, especially the North-East region, should not be made in the context of counter-terrorism.

The development agenda is not about the Boko Haram domestic terrorists themselves, but rather about those most susceptible to the goals and messages of domestic terrorism. It is precisely within this broader context that a political vocabulary, which goes beyond the narrow confines of domestic terrorism and counter-terrorism, is needed. Fighting socioeconomic issues rather than domestic terrorism provides a better paradigm and framework for a number of reasons. First, Islamist domestic terrorism more accurately reflects the political and ideological dimension of the threat. No matter how diverse the causes, motivations, and ideologies behind domestic terrorism, all attempts at premeditated violence against unarmed civilians share the traits of violent Islamist domestic terrorism. Second, while domestic terrorism is a deadly security challenge, Islamist domestic terrorism is primarily a political threat, and non-coercive measures should be given a chance to counter this terrorism. The possible transition from Islamist domestic terrorism to full-blown domestic terrorism is not pre-destined. In

fact, only a few domestic terrorists venture into full-blown terrorism. At the same time, it is clear that most Boko Haram terrorists start their individual journey towards extremist violence first by becoming Islamist terrorists.

Since socioeconomic issues are often a precursor to domestic terrorism, focusing on socioeconomic challenges amounts to preventing domestic terrorism at an earlier stage, before it is too late for non-coercive measures. In addition, domestic terrorism has social and economic dimensions. While there are Nigerian societies where acts of domestic terrorism find some sympathy and degree of support, there are no "domestic terrorist" societies. Moreover, it is impossible to talk about domestic terrorism as a social and economic phenomenon. The relative popularity of the Boko Haram terrorist group in the Northern region of Nigeria, specifically the North-East region, can only be explained within the framework of such indigent Nigerian societies where religious-based domestic terrorism finds a climate of legitimacy and implicit support. These impoverished Nigerian societies are permeated by a deep sense of collective frustration, humiliation, and deprivation relative to expectations. This social habitat is easily exploited by Boko Haram domestic terrorists. This is why focusing on the collective grievances behind Islamist domestic terrorism is probably the most effective way of addressing the root causes of domestic terrorism. This effort at prevention can be conceived of as a first line of defense against domestic terrorism. The goal is to reduce the social, economic, and political appeal of domestic terrorism by isolating Boko Haram terrorists and winning over potential recruits. Once the challenge is defined as such, the next and more difficult step is to identify an effective strategy to fight Islamist domestic terrorism.

Assessment of the Socioeconomic Problems in Nigeria

The socioeconomic and political context where domestic terrorism takes root, particularly in the context of the North-East region, presents an urgent situation for the remaining regions (North-Central, North-West, South-South, South-West, and South-East). This enabling environment can be altered most effectively by focusing on relative deprivation and human development. Domestic terrorism has deep roots in Nigerian society due to a number of reasons, including easy access to arms and ammunition, poor governance, marginalization of the rural areas, and absence of justice. Moreover, volatile geopolitical situations and porous borders make it vulnerable to all kinds of terrorist threats.[2] Research on domestic terrorism

has focused mainly on the roots of these problems; researchers, analysts, and policy makers alike have little understanding of what drives domestic terrorism. Issues such as poverty, unemployment, poor health, and illiteracy are important contributing factors.[3] In this highly competitive and polarized country, there is far greater awareness of economic and social injustices among the citizens. A survey of the current socioeconomic landscape of the North-East region of Nigeria reveals obvious deprivations. 36 percent of the population lives in poverty, and about 100,000 infants die annually because of diarrhea. Only 35 percent of the population is part of the labor force, and the gross enrolment in elementary education is less than 24 percent.[4] Social and economic inequities, limited access to education and other basic facilities, unemployment, and growing poverty have all produced an atmosphere of despair, which gives rise to frustrations, sense of deprivation and, ultimately, to outrage in the North-East region of Nigeria.

Since dealing with domestic terrorism requires a multidimensional approach, it is necessary for federal and state governments to re-examine the socioeconomic conditions in the North-East region, the main operational area of the domestic terrorists. The North-East region of Nigeria is the worst hit in terms of poverty, unemployment, underdevelopment, and lack of access to education. The people are the most essential pillar of any country's productivity and development. It is the fundamental duty and responsibility of the state to fulfill the basic needs of its people. Basic human needs comprise of shelter, food, and clothing; when these needs are not fulfilled, socioeconomic problems are bound to arise.

The real issue here is not the problems of the North-East region; rather, it is the extent to which the problems are being given attention and tackled. When grievances of the citizens are not rapidly addressed, they often turn out to be a menace for the country. Such citizens exert a negative impact on society; a people deprived of basic necessities of life is either ignorant of or may be spiteful of their duties and obligations toward the country. This results in deviant behavior such as violence, restiveness, drug abuse, smuggling, and corruption. It also breeds poverty, illiteracy, impunity, and many other social evils, including domestic terrorism. A country beset with socioeconomic crises also fails to attract investment. Negligible foreign direct investment (FDI) results in economic slowdown and absence or weakness of competitive local industries, leading to a decline in exports, tumbling stock markets, and inflation.

The North-East region has been facing a range of socioeconomic problems since Nigeria's independence in 1960. From the start, the region had problems of inadequate funds, the need to rehabilitate *almajaris*,[5] poor infrastructure, and widespread poverty. Sir Ahmadu Bello, the late premier of Northern Nigeria, tried his best to solve these socioeconomic problems and to get the state machinery working; due to his sudden death, he could not fulfil his mission. Unfortunately, subsequent military and civilian leaders did not devote enough attention to finding solutions to the various socioeconomic problems. Consequently, the problems exacerbated over time and have become social evils, transmuted into domestic terrorism.

As a developing region, the North-East faces a wide range of social problems, along with political instability which further aggravates the problems. The first problem is poverty. It is rightly said that poverty anywhere is a threat to prosperity everywhere. Some 70 percent of the population of the North-East region lives in rural villages. According to some sources, poverty has increased in the North-East, with the highest incidence of poverty ranging between 54.9 percent to 72.2 percent during the past few years.[6] By another account, 60 percent of the region's population lives below the poverty line.[7] In such conditions, large numbers of northeasterners are deprived of basic necessities of life. Quality education and healthcare are inaccessible. They are forced to think of their survival only.

Perhaps the greatest loss is in the field of education; lack of access to quality education renders the North-East region incapable of dealing with the growing challenges of the twenty-first century. Those affected by poverty are unable to afford quality education and provide a decent upbringing for their children. In addition, negligence on the part of the federal government and governments of the northeastern states aggravates the situation, especially in the area of providing mass education to the *almajiris*. Despite various steps taken by the different state governments to promote quality education, the illiteracy rate has hovered around 72 percent over the years.[8] The North-East spends a meager amount of its gross domestic product (GDP) on this vital sector. Owing to low investment, government-run schools in the region are deprived of basic facilities such as standard classrooms, well-equipped libraries and laboratories, water and sanitation facilities, and electricity. In contrast, the private sector is doing a commendable job in setting up privately-run schools. Owing to the profit objective of this sector, however, this education remains beyond the reach of the poor. The estimated completion rate of primary education

in the region is 30.7 percent among females and 50 percent among males, which shows that the majority of people in the six northeastern states (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, and Yobe) are unable to get a basic education.[9]

The North-East region is also facing the dragon of overpopulation. Its growth rate is very high – of the highest in all of the regions in Nigeria. This may also be a result of porous borders and poor border security and control, which has resulted in an illegal flow of migrants from northern Cameroon, Niger, Chad, and Libya. Since 1967, the population has more than tripled, and the region now has a population of almost 19 million people. Population growth has been a real issue of concern for the federal and northeastern state governments; with limited resources, it is very difficult to cater to the needs of this growing population. The problem is not merely that of population growth or dynamics, but rather negative demographics that are not well managed. The region presently has a youth bulge with over 30 percent of the population under the age of fifteen, and over 50 percent or so are under the age of thirty. Very few jobs are created annually to absorb the growing population and the millions of school leavers. In addition, there is overdependence on poor-yielding arid lands for agriculture and grazing without adequate irrigation and improved farm practices. The health facilities are poor and unable to cater to the rapidly growing population; as a result, life expectancy is about forty-five to fifty years. Great economic disparity also exists among the people of the North-East; the poor are committing crimes out of hunger while the rich are amassing more and more wealth.

The massively increasing population has almost outstripped resources and job opportunities. The region is faced with the problem of unemployment, underemployment, and unemployability; many youth, including graduates, do not even have employable skills for today's labor market nor do they make the best of opportunities around them, such as seeking employment during the dry season, so they remain underemployed or underutilized.[10] The existing unemployment rates are 46.1 percent in Adamawa, 41.4 percent in Bauchi, 52.3 percent in Borno, 46.7 percent in Gombe, 49.1 percent in Taraba, and 43.8 percent in Yobe.[11] The North-East confronts cyclical, technical, structural, and seasonal unemployment, which is economically and socially devastating. The worst is that the unemployment increases every year, which, in the long term, will be harmful to not only the regional

economy, but also the entire country. Unemployment creates frustration, a revengeful attitude among the deprived, and leads to an increase in crime.

The recently crowned Emir of Kano, Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, was quoted as saying in an interview with the *Financial Times* of London that,

> More useful is the suggestion that education (or lack of it) and religion (that has become less tolerant) constitute the bane of North-East underdevelopment. In the 1950s, the Western regional government inaugurated a free primary education program; South West governments in the Second Republic followed suit with free education at all levels, passing laws to make education compulsory till age 16. Imo, with the highest number of students in primary, secondary and tertiary institutions nationwide, has extended its free education program to all levels, while Ogun is spending N1.4 billion on free books for school pupils. The nineteen (19) Northern states, especially the North-East, will need to mobilize their people for mass and compulsory basic education. Illiteracy not only creates unemployment, it makes millions, who, without formal education and skills, become unemployable for life.[12]

Owing to poverty and lack of access to quality education, many parents in the North-East region become destitute and are unable to send their children to schools. Instead, their children become wage earners from a very early age and support their family. Human Rights Watch estimated in 2009 that there would be one to two million beggar children in the region by 2013. Reaffirming this situation, Sanusi also said,

> when the North East leaders organized a summit on the almajiri problem in 2009, they came out with a curious resolution to "reform" the system that has created a mass of two million beggar-children across the North with one million in Kano State alone, but child destitution needs total eradication and the children put to school to acquire knowledge and skills that are required in an increasingly globalized era.[13]

The previous comments underscore the gravity of the situation. The main reason for destitution is poverty, while a low literacy rate has also contributed to the problem to a large extent. Child destitution is a sort of deluge that drains away our precious talents from being utilized in the right places. Child destitution pushes children and young people into bad company and

immoral activities, such as the use of drugs and crime, and increases their vulnerability to extremist ideologies that offer emancipation.

Corruption is another huge socioeconomic problem. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) has ranked the North-East as the most corrupt region in Nigeria.[14] The menace of corruption is linked to a multitude of social vices. Its roots are linked to injustice, inequity, mistrust, suspicion, favoritism, greed, inefficiency, and so forth. Corruption creates a sense of insecurity, exacerbates poverty, and adds to the misfortune of the vulnerable segments of the region. It also instills a sense of hopelessness and despondency and threatens the upright values that have been established over centuries of civilized struggle. Rising poverty in the North-East necessitates that 10 percent of the GDP is spent on the social sector, including education, health, safe drinking water, sanitation, and basic infrastructure to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015. At present, northeastern state governments spend only 3 percent of GDP on both health and education whereas other regions allocate 9 percent of GDP to these sectors.[15] To make matters worse, the meager fraction allocated, which is already insufficient to cater to the needs of the population, is misappropriated.

Although phenomenal changes have occurred in other regions, the status and fate of women in the North-East region have not improved, and, indeed, have deteriorated. It comes as no surprise that the North-East region was recently rated as one of the worst regions in Nigeria for its treatment of women. More than fifty-two years after independence, 70 percent of North-East women are still subject to domestic violence. One in three is a victim of rape, honor killing, immolation, or acid attack.[16] Women in the North-East have suffered for years from systemic abuse of human rights, including in the state and sharia courts.[17] Whether women or children, Muslims or Christians, Shiites or atheists, the rights of minorities and vulnerable groups are usually threatened. Moreover, the people of the North-East still struggle between secular British and religious Islamic laws and traditions.

The violation of human rights can be attributed to the absence of timely justice for the masses; justice delayed is justice denied. Dispensation of timely justice is the essence of a welfare society. It is the duty of the state to promote justice and provide avenues for justice; however, this has been a dream for the poor masses in the northeastern region of Nigeria. Since independence, the judiciary has been held captive by the establishment. A

compromised and inefficient judiciary is unable to redress the grievances of the masses. Under such conditions, people resort to violent behavior and, as a means of filling in the gap, they resolve issues by applying extreme interpretations of the sharia legal methods.

Furthermore, religious differences add fuel to the fire. Religious extremism, which became entrenched in the North-East after the Maitatsine[18] religious riots in Kano and Borno states during 1980-1982, continues to manifest itself in different forms that are proving intractable in the region.[19] Religious extremism assumed the form of domestic terror against the state in 2009. Following the bombing of the United Nations' headquarters in Abuja, North-Central Nigeria, acts of domestic terror have only grown worse and more frequent. Targeted killings of unarmed civilians is another menace that claims too many innocent lives almost daily. Owing to poor governance, the government is losing control over law and order. Suicide bomb attacks, targeted and indiscriminate killings, robbery, and other crimes have become recurrent events. Sadly, the federal government and northeastern state governments seem to be at a loss as to how best to confront it.

Social problems are interlinked with economic problems. Economic prosperity serves as a backbone and insurance for the overall progress of a nation. One thing is common in all developed nations − they are economically sound and they are internally fairly stable. The state apparatus has a monopoly on the legitimate use of force and strictly enforces it, even if there are exceptional cases. When citizens of a country do not have to worry about their daily struggle to survive and earn a livelihood, they naturally divert their attention to more productive things. The focus usually shifts to improving the quality of education, providing accessible healthcare, developing technologies that make life more liveable, and much more. Poor economic conditions at the micro and macro levels are the root cause of so many problems that exist in the North-East. As if the power crises, lack of FDI for the development of industrial zones, and outdated technology were not enough, the region's free-fall into terrorist control has dealt a fatal blow to the region's already crumbling economic status.

Domestic terrorism has emerged as a monster for the world in general and for Nigeria's North-East region in particular. The involvement of the federal government and northeastern state governments in the declared War on Terror has proved a nightmare. In August 2014, Boko Haram ransacked the towns of Gwoza, Gamboa Biu, Bayo, Limankara, Ngala, Askira, Uba,

Kusar, Bara, Banki, Gulak, Madagali, Bama, and others in the North-East; dethroned their chiefs; occupied their territories; ransacked a riot-police training school; and successfully attacked military barracks.[20] The image of the North-East as a peace-loving region has since been tarnished. Thousands of people living in the region have lost their lives while millions have lost everything they owned and are either displaced to safer, but less welcoming locations in neighboring towns and states, or forced to migrate across the border into Cameroon and parts of Chad.

Boko Haram's domestic terrorism has affected the economy of the North-East region, and by extension, the economy of all of Nigeria. Domestic terrorism is very closely linked to the declining economic conditions. The region's economy has suffered on three accounts: first, large amounts of money are being expended on the war on terrorism, which could have gone to development; second, many foreign investors and markets have been lost due to the insecurity; third, local businesses, industries, and livelihoods have been lost. Energy crises have further crippled the already tumbling economy.[21] They have practically jammed the industrial wheel of the region; owing to frequent power outages, many industrial units have closed. Closure of industries has occasioned the loss of jobs and increased the competitive edge on a large scale. An energy-starved economy fails to attract foreign investment. The poor economic condition of the North-East does not only keep foreign investors away, but local ones as well. When the investment climate for businesses and the industrial sector are not healthy, the inflow of foreign exchange is checked, which may lead to a decline in foreign reserves, and will compel the country to seek loans from other countries and international financial institutions.

Another major problem is the North-East's huge debt incurred by incumbent and former governors as well as by the region's continued dependence on international donors. Moreover, the tax system in the North-East is inefficient and unsatisfactory. The ratio of direct taxes is more than indirect taxes. Tax evasion is common; the rich are reluctant to pay tax, while the poor pay tax even on the purchase of a matchbox. With unhealthy conditions, the region is likely to face low exports and high imports. This is also the case with the industrial sector. Due to an inconsistent supply of electricity to the industrial sector, industries fail to produce optimal output, let alone surplus production. The production of goods in lesser quantities has affected exports from the industrial sector. This causes federal and the northeastern state governments to import goods

and solicit billions of naira in order to meet the needs of the masses, leading to inflation. Inflation provides an important insight into the economy of the North-East states and the policies governing it. Stable inflation not only provides impetus for economic growth, but also helps uplift vulnerable strata of society. In recent years, the North-East region has been in the grip of high inflation, which among other things, has adversely affected its economic health. The overall Consumer Price Index, a key indicator of inflation, has swelled by 33 percent in the last four years, eroding the purchasing power of the people as the overall economy has not performed in line with ever-increasing prices.[22]

Moreover, people living in areas affected by domestic terrorism are migrating to other, safer areas in the region. The North-East has seen the largest internal displacement and migration since the beginning of Boko Haram's domestic terrorism in 2009. 650,000 people have abandoned their homes, businesses, possessions, and property.[23] This influx of people into new areas, in addition to their rehabilitation and provision, is an economic burden for federal and state governments. Unemployment is already prevalent, and now the need to provide employment and productive engagement to these migrants has also become a serious concern. This displaced portion of the population contributes little or nothing worthwhile to the national economy, yet the economy needs to provide for them.

Last, but not least, the loss of a vibrant tourism industry has also contributed to the economic decline. The North-East region has long been a great tourist attraction; the beautiful hills, game reserves, the lush green valleys, shimmering lakes, and flowing waterfalls brought many a tourist to the region. This tourism contributed to foreign exchange. Besides attracting foreign exchange, the tourism industry also provided employment to local people, and served as a source of friendly relations with other countries. Now, both local and foreign media have projected the region as a dangerous and unsafe place.

Relative Deprivation

Breeding grounds for Boko Haram's domestic terrorist recruitment emerge not necessarily under conditions of abject poverty and deprivation, but rather when negative social, economic, and political trends converge. In fact, when analyzed in a broader framework of socioeconomic and political deprivation, the societal support for domestic terrorism in the North-East region of Nigeria gains greater relevance. Dismissing the social and economic

causes of domestic terror on the grounds that some Boko Haram domestic terrorists have middle-class backgrounds is simplistic and misleading. The weak and failing Nigerian state, in addition to ungoverned border spaces that create safe havens for domestic terrorism, are all characteristic of the Northern and/or North-East regions of Nigeria. Boko Haram's domestic terrorism in the North-East region of Nigeria is not necessarily caused by socioeconomic problems, although certainly correlations exist between deprivation and domestic terrorism.

Absolute deprivation in the region is not the real challenge. The more challenging question, particularly in the North-East region of Nigeria, is relative deprivation: the absence of opportunities relative to expectations.[24] Such focus on relative deprivation is important because poverty is no longer an absolute concept in the context of civilization. Civilization creates an acute awareness about opportunities available elsewhere. This leads to frustration, victimization, and humiliation among growing cohorts of urbanized, undereducated, and unemployed Muslim youth who are aware of the opportunities across Nigeria. The scale of youth frustration in the North-East region is compounded by the demographic explosion, growing expectations, weak state capacity, and diminishing opportunities for upward mobility in most of the northern states.[25] Civilization further exacerbates this situation because restive Muslim masses of both genders are caught in the growing tension between religious tradition and civilization.

Socioeconomic decay in the North-East region of Nigeria has created considerably more frustration than in other parts of the Northern region, in part due to historical memory. Particularly in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa, a sense of nostalgia for the golden age of Islam − during which Arab civilizations far surpassed Europe − is deeply ingrained in the political culture. Muslim-dominated states in Nigeria have a historic, cultural, and civilizational sense of rivalry with the Christian populations in the other regions. Geographic proximity further complicates this picture. Other regions in the country (South-South, South-West, and South-East) are often a historic point of reference in terms of social, economic, and political success. Feelings of a historic sense of superiority combined with the more recent memories of colonial subjugation create a dangerous sense of victimization, resentment, and injustice in large parts of the Northern regions.

All these factors significantly compound the level of frustration of a great civilization nurturing tremendous expectations and aspirations. An

effective strategic campaign against domestic terrorism in the Northern region at large should take into consideration the socio-economic dimension of this collective frustration very seriously. Little can be done in the short term about deeply rooted cultural and psychological grievances, but quite a lot can be done in the social and economic sphere. Take the question of political Islam for example. Weak Muslim northern states in Nigeria are often unable to provide adequate social and economic services. The capacity gap within Muslim states such as Yobe, Adamawa, Borno, and Bauchi creates a vacuum frequently filled by grassroots Islamic organizations that provide goods and services in crucial areas such as health, education, and housing. The strength of these Islamic networks is magnified by the weaknesses of the state system. In that sense, the absence of effective public services opens the field for the rise of Islamist networks with their own political agendas.

Finally, in addition to socioeconomic decay, the absence of constitutional liberties (i.e., the use of sharia law) brings a "political" dimension to relative deprivation in the northern states, particularly in the North-East region. In other words, there is a growing gap between political aspirations and the realities on the ground. Improving educational standards without increasing prospects for employment, or providing jobs without creating outlets for political and social participation all create a combustible mix in the North-East region.

The growing number of educated but unemployed youth is particularly alarming. It is, after all, the educated youth who have the highest political aspirations and expectations, thus being the most frustrated when their expectations are unmet. The growth of unemployment among the educated often creates a class of "frustrated achievers" who may end up becoming domestic terrorists looking for a political cause to embrace.[26] Repressive political systems exacerbate these dynamics. In most Nigerian Muslim states, the mosque is the only institution that is not brutally suppressed; and when the mosque is the only outlet for mass politics, the outcome is predictable: the Islamization of dissent. As dissent turns Islamic, what naturally follows is the politicization of Islam. Political Islam thus slowly has evolved into a resistance movement against injustice, state oppression, and western support for repressive regimes.

As federal and state governments become more repressive, a vicious cycle of violence and counter-violence emerges. Once political Islam is pushed underground, it turns more aggressive and resentful. It is therefore

absolutely necessary to provide legitimate political outlets other than Islam and the mosque for opposition movements in the North-East states.[27] All these problems illustrate the need for alternative strategies to address domestic terrorism in the states of the North-East region. The new approach should find ways to promote democratization, security, and economic development in a comprehensive and harmonious framework. Given the multifaceted nature of factors fueling domestic terrorism, the social and economic agenda against relative deprivation and domestic terrorism needs to be defined very broadly. The goal of "human development in North-East region of Nigeria" offers such an alternative.

Human Development in the North-East Region of Nigeria

Human development involves a much broader public policy agenda than economic growth, mainly because it takes into consideration the social and political dimensions of the human condition as a whole. The basic idea behind human development, as I have conceptualized, is that Gross Domestic Product growth fails to capture the complexity and breadth of development as a social and political phenomenon. Human development considers the social and political progress towards freedom and democracy as an integral part of development. Having dedicated my career to drawing national attention to the crucial role of democracy, freedom, and human rights in promoting economic development,[28] this new way of looking at development is therefore motivated by the need to prioritize the quality of life as much as the quantity of growth. An integral part of my approach to economic development is the need for institutions that promote better governance. Improving state capacity, state legitimacy, and state security are equally important dimensions of better governance and human development. In that sense, human development expands the meaning of development in a similar way that relative deprivation broadens the meaning of poverty. Both concepts are particularly relevant to the debate on the root causes of domestic terrorism. With their emphasis on economic, social, and political aspirations rather than just income per capita, "relative deprivation" and "human development" offer analytical tools for a more strategic approach to domestic terrorism and counter-domestic terrorism. These two concepts also shift the debate from the realm of economic growth to the realm of governance and political economy. Such focus on the Nigerian state is particularly useful in the context of the North-East region, where political power and economic structures are strongly intertwined. One can argue

that the most important challenge facing the majority of the Muslim states in the North-East region is their inability to invest in human development. The underdevelopment of the North-East region needs to be addressed in its proper political, social, and economic context, and not in a vacuum detached from the reality of the power structure. Only such an approach can establish linkages, correlations, and even causalities between political and economic failure. For instance, linkages between failing educational systems and authoritarian state structures become particularly relevant when the problem is analyzed in light of the human development approach. This is also why human development sees democratization and development as a simultaneous process. In other words, it refutes the sequencing argument that places development first, democratization later – an approach strongly implied in modernization theory. As I have argued, democratization should not be detached from economic modernization. Prioritizing one over the other is often bound to produce neither. The systemic connections between political, economic, and social stagnation have been identified in four states in the North-East region, noted by human development reports focusing on democracy, knowledge, and gender deficits. Building on these findings, one can argue that an effective human development strategy can also go a long way in fighting domestic terrorism, especially if enough attention is paid to relative deprivation. This, in turn, requires prioritizing education and employment opportunities, better governance, and incremental democratization in the North-East region states.

The Case for Fighting Domestic Terrorism with Human Development

The economic and social context within which domestic terrorism takes root is profoundly important. Without societal support, most domestic terrorist groups are doomed to fail. That is why an impoverished and politically unstable country like Nigeria is where domestic terrorism tends to become a "systemic" problem. I have argued elsewhere that "Northern states with low, stagnant, and unequally distributed per capita income that have remained dependent on primary commodities for their exports face dangerously high risks of prolonged domestic terrorism. In the absence of economic development neither good political institutions, nor ethnic and religious homogeneity, nor high military spending provide significant defenses against large-scale violence."[29] These factors should help us realize that unfavorable socioeconomic dynamics can degenerate into

political violence and perpetuate a vicious cycle of domestic terrorism. At the very least, such problems create an environment where domestic terrorism finds social acceptance. While domestic terrorism results from many interrelated causes, it has recently become popular to argue that the root causes of domestic terrorism are unrelated to economic deprivation and lack of education.[30] The argument that poverty and a lack of education are not associated with domestic terrorism is based on a fallacy that can be summarized as follows: domestic terrorists do not tend to come from the poorest elements of the population; instead, they are often relatively well educated and above average in terms of income. Thus, poverty alone is not the primary factor that disposes people to domestic terrorism, and reducing poverty or improving education will not seriously diminish domestic terrorism.[31] The most common objection to this common argument comes in reference to the Boko Haram domestic terrorist attacks: the majority of their leaders came from good and well educated families, and their leader even had studied at the University of Medina, perceived as one of the most expensive universities. If poverty and a lack of education were to produce domestic terrorism as it is often argued, most Boko Haram terrorists would come from the poorest communities or states in Nigeria.[32] The argument that socioeconomic deprivation is unrelated to domestic terrorism is erroneous for a number of reasons. First, the argument is based on a very narrow and exclusive focus on "elite" domestic terrorist leaders. As a domestic terrorism expert points out, "Effective domestic terrorist groups rely on a division of labor between young and uneducated 'foot soldiers' and ideologically trained and well-funded elite operatives. In Nigeria, the former are often plucked from *madaris*."[33] It is therefore important to acknowledge that while domestic terrorist leaders tend to come from professional classes, the foot soldiers are often poor and uneducated. One should also not be confused by the fact that at the highest level, the implementation of domestic terrorist activity requires proficient group skills and sophistication. The poorest and least educated masses can be recruited by domestic terrorist masterminds; yet they would make ineffective domestic terrorists in a complex operation. Indeed, the more complex an operation is, the greater security risks it entails, and the more likely the participants are to be from the elite – the result of a careful screening process. All these factors only reinforce the importance of addressing the question of relative deprivation and frustrated achievers as a social milieu. The second point with regard to the link between socioeconomic deprivation and domestic terrorism

is the fact that domestic terrorist groups usually seek a failing and poor state like Nigeria, in which to set up shop. This is why Nigeria has easily turned into a haven for domestic terrorism and is often engulfed in a vicious cycle of domestic terrorism or violence. As an expert points out, "Nigeria provides convenient operational bases and safe havens for domestic terrorists. Boko Haram domestic terrorist group take advantage of failing states' porous borders, of its weak and non-existent law enforcement and security services, and of its ineffective judicial institutions to move men, weapons, and money around North-East region of Nigeria."[34]

The number of those impoverished, malnourished, and deprived of fundamental needs, such as security, health care, and education, totals in the hundreds of millions. Is the fact that Nigeria is feared as a breeding ground of instability and mass-murder, as well as reservoirs and exporters of terror, not evidence enough of social and economic problems that are leading to increased transnational terrorism? From Nigeria to Chad, from Chad to Cameroon, from Cameroon to Mali, ungoverned border spaces often attract domestic terrorist networks that use these territories for two major purposes: first, as a staging ground for national attacks; and second, to recruit uneducated and impoverished young men without any prospects.[35]

In that sense, what we should really be focusing on is not the decision of this or that individual (particularly not leaders such as Abubakar Shekau, who are highly atypical even in their own movements) to become a domestic terrorist; rather, we should be looking at the social conditions that make dissident movements more likely to turn to terror and, more importantly, the circumstances under which such dissident movements receive popular support. Such an approach may also provide us with invaluable keys to distinguish between the limited success of a domestic terrorist who does not have any popular support versus the broad backing that Abubakar Shekau and Boko Haram enjoy. When thinking about domestic terrorism, we have to remind ourselves that it is primarily within a troubled and desperate social, economic, and cultural environment that the engineers of domestic terrorism freely recruit and operate, thus causing greater dangers to Nigerian society.

Finally, the assumption that Boko Haram domestic terrorism is unrelated to education and development is based on the failure to distinguish between education and indoctrination in Nigeria. It has been argued that Nigerian Boko Haram domestic terrorism is unrelated to economic deprivation and a lack of education.[36] I have suggested elsewhere that associating a secondary

school education or a higher education with participation in Boko Haram mistakenly imposes a generalized image of educated terrorists.[37] Before reaching sweeping generalizations about economic deprivation and a lack of education with Boko Haram domestic terrorism, it is important to remember that the context within which domestic terrorism occurs has crucial implications. Instead of looking at the connection between Boko Haram domestic terrorism and education in a broader global context, it should be solely confined to Nigerian domestic terrorism.[38] In the case of Nigeria's extremist Boko Haram, what is considered education is actually ideological indoctrination.[39]

Conclusion: The Need for Human Development Support in the North-East Region of Nigeria

Change in Nigeria towards better governance and human development will essentially come from within; yet outside actors such as the United States can also help by increasing and coordinating their financial assistance for human development in the North-East region states. The coordination of federal and state governments' assistance programs will assure the pooling of funds into one budget. If managed effectively, such budget coordination can significantly improve the effectiveness of assistance by avoiding duplication and putting more resources in critical areas such as rural literacy, labor productivity, and microcredit programs linked to technical training. Such increased assistance, however, should be granted with stricter conditionality for institutional reforms. In other words, increased economic assistance to Muslim states like Borno, Yobe, Bauchi, and Adamawa should be presented as an incentive for domestic political reforms. The ownership of reform should be located in the states in the North-East region. While no attempts should be made to impose reforms, federal government assistance should be conditional on institutional reforms. A common mistake of the past has been to accept cosmetic changes as signs of modernization or democratization. This time the effort needs to go beyond the creation of civil society organizations that can easily be co-opted by repressive federal and state governments. The criteria should be institutional changes promoting better governance, political participation, and human development. The reason civil society promotion or income per capita growth has not led to genuine political change in Nigeria is because state institutions never had to change. The organizations, arrangements, laws, decrees, and regulations that constitute the political rules remain

stagnant in Nigeria. Rather than providing transparency, accountability, and political rights – giving citizens a voice and a stake in the system – Nigerian political institutions tended to limit political participation and individual freedom. As previously mentioned, these repressive measures drove political opposition to the mosques and fueled political Islam and domestic terrorism. This is why conditionality in federal government assistance should focus on institutions that will promote not only socioeconomic growth, but also political rights and liberties. In short, this is the essence of a new strategy that will fight domestic terrorism with human development. Such conditionality, in practice, will have to consider progress in areas such as constitutional reform, freedom of the press, the formation of political parties, and a domestically determined calendar for free and fair elections in the medium to long run. There is obviously no simple blueprint for good political liberalization and democratization. Yet, good governance seldom takes root in the absence of social and economic development. Across a wide range of studies and a great variety of sampling, time periods, and statistical methods, the level of socioeconomic development continues to be the single most powerful predictor of the likelihood of democratization.[40] Particularly when it comes to the crucial question of the sustainability of democracy, the level of socioeconomic development is an even stronger determinant. Nigeria's foreign policy urgently needs alternative strategies to address domestic terrorism in its Muslim states. The new approach should seek to promote democratization, security, and economic development in a comprehensive and harmonious framework. Ultimately, Nigeria's success against domestic terrorism will not depend on winning wars in the North-East region, but rather on promoting non-military policies that will strengthen the institutional underpinning of human development in its Muslim North-East region and Northern region generally.

Notes

1 Oluwaseun Bamidele, "Under Threat of Domestic Terrorism: Addressing and Overcoming the Boko Haram 'Jama'atu Ahlus-Sunnah Lidda'Awati Wal Jihad' in the North-Eastern Region of Nigeria," *Africa Insight* 44, no. 3 (2014): 97-110.

2 ICG (International Crisis Group), "Curbing violence in Nigeria (11): The Boko Haram insurgency," *Africa Report* no. 216 (2014): 1-54.

3 Ben E. Aigbokhan, "Growth, Inequality and Poverty in Nigeria," Economic Commission for Africa, *ACGS/ MPAMS Discussion Paper* no. 3 (February 2008).

4 Ibid.

5 The Hausa term "*almajiri*" refers to a person who migrates in the quest for Islamic knowledge, either to study in a specific place or with a popular teacher. The term is derived from the Arabic *al-muhaajir* (*al-muhaajirun*, plural) which means emigrant, and, by inference, is a learned scholar who propagates the peaceful course of Islam. The Islamic concept of migration is widely practiced, especially when acquisition of knowledge at home is either inconvenient or insufficient. *Al-muhaajirun* refers to the companions of the noble Prophet Muhammad who migrated with him from Mecca to Medina in the year 622 CE due to the persecution by the Meccan idol worshippers. The *muhaajirun* or "emigrants" saw the historic migration as an opportunity to leave an environment where learning, preaching, and practicing Islam were criminalized for a clime where learning and righteousness flourished. In contrast, the *almajiri* concept has since outlived its purpose and has contributed to child begging and creating potential terrorist camps in Nigeria.

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9 Ibid.

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12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Peter Ikita, "Corruption in Nigeria, not just Boko Haram, is at the Root of Violence: Secrecy surrounding Security Matters and Deeply Entrenched Corruption Are Failing Communities across the Country," *Guardian*, July 11, 2014, http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/povertymatters/2014/jul/11/boko-haram-nigeria-violence-corruption-security.

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16 Amnesty International, "The State of the World's Human Rights: Amnesty International Report 2014/15,", http://www.amnestyusa.org/pdfs/AIR15_English.PDF.

17 Freedom House, "Freedom in the World, Nigeria," https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2014/nigeria#.VeTqX601j4g.

18 Mohammed Marwa (died 1980), best known by his nickname Maitatsine, was a controversial Islamic preacher in Nigeria. Maitatsine is a Hausa word meaning "the one who damns," and referred to his vitriolic speeches against the state. Originally from Marwa in northern Cameroon. Mohammed Marwa moved to Kano, Nigeria around 1945 upon completing his studies. There he became known for his controversial preaching on the Qur'an. Maitatsine claimed to be a prophet, and saw himself as a *mujaddid* (one who revives Islam) in the image of Sheikh Usman dan Fodio.

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