



THE POLITICS AND PROFIT OF A CRISIS:

A Political Marketplace Analysis of the Humanitarian Crisis in Northeast Nigeria

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Acknowledgments:

Special thanks to Alex de Waal, Dan Maxwell, Aditya Sarkar, Chom Bagu, Darren Kew, Mary Kaldor, Nisar Majid, and Susanne Jaspars for their feedback on drafts of this paper and to Lisa Avery for support on the project.

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After the politicians created the monster, they lost control of it.

- Senior Security Officer in the North East, 2014¹

ABSTRACT

A manmade humanitarian crisis is a tragedy, but for some, it is also a lucrative opportunity. As the crisis deepens prompting massive security and humanitarian spending, along with the increasing cost of rebuilding, for certain individuals, the ensuing crisis economy becomes more lucrative than the peacetime economy. While some benefit, millions suffer. The crisis in northeast Nigeria epitomizes this dynamic. In 2015, President Buhari declared a “technical victory” over Boko Haram, yet seven years later, the insurgency raged on, and the humanitarian crisis reached new heights with more than 4 million in the northeast facing critical food insecurity. Using the political marketplace framework, this paper analyses the politics behind the crisis and how competitive, rent-seeking politics caused and have perpetuated the manmade crisis in the northeast. This analysis covers the genesis and evolution of the crisis from the late 1990s through March 2022. I argue that efforts to end the crisis have been undermined by those who benefit from a continued crisis economy funded by security, humanitarian, and development rents. This paper describes the evolution and competition of these interests, along with the interplay between the humanitarian response and political marketplace dynamics.

¹ Quoted in Crisis Group 2014. “Curbing the Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency,” Crisis Group Africa Report No.216, (April 3), 1.

INTRODUCTION

In 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari appeared on the BBC and declared a “technical victory” over Boko Haram, yet seven years later, the insurgency rages on, and the humanitarian crisis has reached historic heights.² In March 2022, the Nigerian Government reported that more than 4.1 million people may experience crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity during the coming lean season (June – August),³ a level of food insecurity that has plagued the northeast since 2016. In addition, humanitarian operations continued to be hampered by a lack of access to at-risk populations due to ongoing military operations and areas outside government control.⁴ In combination with the COVID-19 pandemic, the humanitarian crisis continued seemingly unabated underlining a key question—despite the billions of dollars spent and the numerous domestic and international actors working to respond, why did the crisis continue?

Using the political marketplace framework,⁵ this paper analyzes the real politics behind the crisis and argues that competitive, transactional politics caused and have perpetuated the manmade crisis in the northeast. Evidence suggests that there are vested interests in a continued crisis economy fueled by security, development, and humanitarian rents along with war-profiteering schemes that have undermined efforts to end the crisis. This paper outlines how these interests have evolved since the conflict began and describes the interplay between the humanitarian response and political marketplace dynamics in Borno State.

Part 1. Borno State: An Embedded Political Marketplace

Nigeria began transitioning to democracy in 1998. This would be its fourth attempt at democracy since 1960, and as with each of the previous trials, what would appear democratic on the surface would be far from the reality.⁶ Underneath the democratic façade, the real politics in Nigeria can be described as transactional, rent-based politics in which elite political alliances and control over rents and violence have outweighed the importance of accountability to citizens. In essence, political power is turned into an elite-held commodity that is bought, sold, and traded using money (political budgets) and at times, violently fought over.

Nigeria is a multitiered, hierarchical marketplace composed of federal, state, and local levels. The federal level has the most power structurally and de facto, followed by the states. Local levels are largely dominated by the state governors and often act as direct extensions of the state marketplaces.⁷ This is in

2 BBC. 2015. “Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants ‘technically defeated’ – Buhari,” (December 24): <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35173618>.

3 Comité Permanent Inter-Etats de Lutte Contre La Sécheresses Dans Le Sahel (CILSS). 2022. “Cadre Harmonisé pour l'identification des zones à risque et des populations vulnérables dans 21 États et le territoire fédéral (FCT) du Nigeria.” Report. Government of Nigeria; Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel. 11 March. Accessed 5 October 2022. https://fsccluster.org/sites/default/files/documents/fiche-nigeria_mar_2022_final_reviewed.pdf.

4 Ibid.

5 This comes from de Waal, Alex. 2015. *The Real Politics of the Horn of Africa: Money, War, and the Business of Power*. Cambridge: Polity, 2015.

6 For more on the previously attempted republics, see Falola, Toyin and Heaton, Matthew M. 2008. *A History of Nigeria*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; Joseph, Richard. 1987. *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; and Ellis, Stephen. 2016. *This Present Darkness: A History of Nigerian Organized Crime*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

7 For a detailed analysis of how local governments function as extensions of state-level political marketplaces, see Page, Matthew T.

part because the Federal government holds and controls the disbursement of oil revenues across Nigeria's 36 states and capital territory and the states control the disbursement to the local government areas (LGAs). Nigeria's political marketplace is largely funded by domestic oil rents channeled through and diverted from government budgets. Historically, oil-derived revenues have constituted 65 to as much as 85 percent of all net government revenues divided across the federal, state, and local governments.⁸ The International Monetary Fund (IMF) reports that Nigeria has one of the lowest levels of revenue collection in the world, and future estimations are not optimistic.⁹ In 2020, the majority of states were bordering on bankruptcy, even before the 2020 oil shocks and pandemic. Except for oil rich Rivers State, all were dependent on federal account allocations for their budgets.¹⁰

The Boko Haram insurgency has stretched across northeastern Nigeria but is primarily concentrated in Borno State, followed by Adamawa and Yobe States. This paper focuses on Borno State, but additional analysis of Yobe and Adamawa states is warranted.

The following section outlines critical junctures in the evolution of the political marketplace in Borno state and how junctures at the national level altered the state marketplace as well. Since the reestablishment of elections in 1999, Borno state has mostly operated as a collusive oligopoly, meaning a limited number of political actors have worked together to maintain their political power and keep out any new political players.¹¹ Many political actors are rotating in and out of government positions with the backing of godfathers, but the key political position in Borno has, and continues to be, the governor followed by the state's three national senate seats. The governor's position is uniquely powerful in that the governor has discretionary control to reappropriate state budget lines to "security votes" as well as a constitutional immunity shielding himself from civil or criminal proceedings while in office.¹² Security votes are officially budgeted funds given to certain federal, state, and local officials for theoretically anything security-related, but in practice, security votes are used as opaque slush funds.¹³ In essence, while the legislature may technically approve any budget, security votes give the governor the ability to manage the budget as he sees fit. Politics in Nigeria are incredibly gendered, and women face immense hurdles in political participation, especially in the north. To date, Borno State has not had a female governor or deputy governor.

Borno marketplace has its own distinct characteristics, but it affects and is affected by national marketplace dynamics. The critical junctures over the last twenty years align with shifts in political alliances, military tactics, and most importantly, political budgets. These shifts can be broken into roughly five

And Abdul H. Wando. 2022. Halting the Kleptocratic Capture of Local Government in Nigeria. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for Peace.

8 This trend continued up until 2020 when the price of oil dropped substantially requiring the government to fund almost half of the federal budget with loans. Nigeria operates on a federally enshrined formula for revenue distribution after other statutory deductions (e.g. 13% of oil revenues for oil-producing states). 52.68 percent of collected revenues are allocated to the federal government; 26.72 percent to the 36 state governments; and 20.60 percent to the 774 local government areas.

9 International Monetary Fund. 2020. "IMF Staff Completes 2020 Article IV Mission to Nigeria," (December 11): <https://www.imf.org/en/News/Articles/2020/12/11/pr20369-nigeria-imf-staff-completes-2020-article-iv-mission>.

10 Okeowo, Gabriel. 2020) *State of States: The 2020 Revised Edition*, budgIT, Lagos, Nigeria.

11 De Waal, Alex, Aditya Sarkar, Sarah Detzner, and Ben Spatz. 2020. "A Theory of Change for Violent Political Marketplaces," Conflict Research Programme Memo, Somerville: World Peace Foundation, 14.

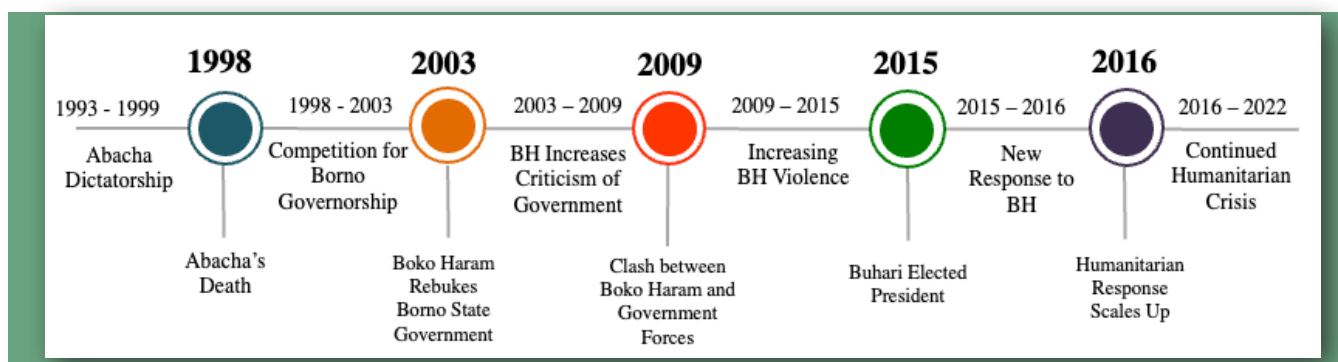
12 This comes from Section 308 of Nigeria's 1999 Constitution. The clause shields the governor (and deputy governor) from any civil or criminal investigation or prosecution while in office but does not prevent any investigation or prosecution once leaving office. For a detailed discussion of the immunity clause, see Okeke, GN, and CE Okeke. 2015. "An Appraisal of the Functional Necessity of the Immunity Clause in the Political Governance of Nigeria," *Journal of African Law*, 59, 1, 99-120.

13 Page, Matthew T. 2018. "Camouflaged Cash: Security Votes and Corruption" Transparency International, (May): 1.

periods: competition for Borno State governor (1998–2003); Boko Haram’s increasing criticism of the Nigerian government (2003–2009); Boko Haram’s violent insurgency (2009–2015); Buhari’s new counterinsurgency campaign (2015–2016); and the continuing humanitarian crisis (2016–2022). The following section (Part 2) outlines these periods and the critical junctures between them while the final section (Part 3) analyzes the interplay between the humanitarian response and political marketplace dynamics.

Part 2: Critical Junctures 1998 – 2022

Figure 1: Critical Junctures in the Borno State Political Marketplace



1. 1998: Death of Abacha

Before 1998, the political marketplace in Borno operated as an extension of the centralized authoritarian kleptocracy led by military dictator Sani Abacha, but his death fundamentally altered its rules.¹⁴ Abacha seized power in a coup following the annulled 1993 election and ruled Nigeria as a dictator until his death in 1998.¹⁵ During his time in power, he and his family are believed to have stolen more than \$2.2 billion from the Nigerian government.¹⁶ Although Abacha made overtures to a democratic transition—allowing political parties to form and scheduling elections—he used patronage and intimidation to maintain control and any political competition was simply an illusion.¹⁷ His sudden death in 1998 created an opening for political competition for office at all levels, and in the northeast, that competition quickly turned violent.

The first series of state elections in Borno was held in January 1999, and competition for political office started soon after Abacha’s death. It was during this period that political alliances formed. Aspiring candidate, Mallam Kachallah, turned to political godfather, Ali Modu Sheriff, for political backing and financing.¹⁸ In Nigeria, “godfathers” are well-connected, and often extremely wealthy, individuals who are believed to work behind the scenes to control which candidates will be elected by leveraging their financial resources and networks to raise support for their chosen candidate (and often hire thugs to suppress oppo-

14 For a discussion of the monetization of politics in Nigeria and the evolution of transactional politics, see Albert, Isaac Olawale. 2005. “Explaining ‘godfatherism’ in Nigerian Politics,” *African Sociological Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2: 79-105; Joseph 1987; and Ellis 2016, 137-156.

15 For a detailed analysis of Abacha’s rise to power and his regime, see Siollun, Max. 2019. *Nigeria’s Soldiers of Fortune: The Abacha and Obasanjo Years*, London: Hurst.

16 Ellis 2016, 144.

17 Falola and Heaton 2008, 233.

18 Albert 2005, 95.

sition) in exchange for some degree of control over the candidate once they are elected.¹⁹ Many godfathers are former military leaders who leveraged their position and connections to become extremely wealthy.²⁰ One Nigerian journalist described the relationship between godfathers and politicians saying that the key to understanding godfatherism in Nigeria is understanding that “the person with the power is not the person with the power [emphasis added].”²¹ This means that the candidate may be elected, but the godfather holds the real power and is repaid for their support with government contracts and favors. In practice, this political agreement can be difficult to enforce. Before the election, candidates may be dependent on their godfathers, both for political finance and political support (both from the political party as well as from voters), but once in office, the power balance shifts.²² Once elected, the politician’s position in the elected office is no longer dependent on the support of their godfather creating the opportunity for politicians to defect from the agreements with their godfathers. This has repeatedly happened in Borno, and the retribution from godfathers has shaken alliances and led to violence.

Ali Modu Sheriff was extremely influential within the All Nigeria Peoples Party (formerly the All Progressives Party, the ‘ANPP’) nationally and locally, and he was extremely wealthy.²³ With Sheriff’s backing, Kachallah won the gubernatorial race and Sheriff won a Borno Senate seat. Sheriff allegedly gave Kachallah his support on the condition that Sheriff would have significant influence in Kachallah’s administration and would ‘profit’ from Kachallah’s administration.²⁴ However, after the election, this agreement quickly fell apart triggering a realignment of political alliances and the competition turned violent.

After winning the election, Kachalla reportedly refused to completely align with Sheriff’s dictates of how he should govern and whom he should appoint to government positions. According to Albert, by the time of Kachalla’s swearing-in, Sheriff was already building support to impeach Kachalla.²⁵ When the push for impeachment failed, Sheriff decided to oust Kachalla in the next election. In 2003, Sheriff leveraged his influence to expel Kachalla from the ANPP and run himself for governor on the ANPP ticket. To achieve this, Sheriff sought the support of political thugs and Mohammed Yusuf, a popular Islamic youth leader in the north who would later found the group known as Boko Haram. It is not uncommon for politicians in Nigeria to make deals with local youth groups (or local armed groups), especially in the lead-up to an election.²⁶ These deals usually involve payments or small promises in exchange for mobilizing supporters, harassing opponents or instigating violence on election day. Indeed, Kachalla also tapped local political muscle and violence broke out between the groups, at one point even leading to the Borno State House of Assembly being set on fire.²⁷ Sheriff and other Borno politicians were implored by the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the party of then-President Olusegun Obasanjo, to disband their militias ahead of the 2003 elections, but they refused.²⁸

19 Albert 2005; Thurston, Alexander. 2015. “Background to Nigeria’s 2015 Elections” Center for Strategic & International Studies, (January).

20 See Amuwo, Adekunle. 2009. The Political Economy of Nigeria’s Post- military Elections, 1999–2007, *Review of African Political Economy*, 36:119, 47.

21 Ibrahim, Jibrin. 2020. “Is APC Changing Leadership?” *Daily Trust*. June 26: <https://www.dailytrust.com.ng/is-apc-changing-owner-ship.html>.

22 See Albert 2005 for notable examples of when godfather-candidate agreements broke down.

23 Albert 2005, 95.

24 Albert 2005, 96.

25 Albert 2005, 95-96.

26 See Ellis 2016, 137-156; Onuoha, Freedom. 2014. “Boko Haram and the Evolving Salafi Jihadist Threat in Nigeria,” in *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*, edited by Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 166-167.

27 Albert 2005, 96; Crisis Group 2014, 11.

28 LeVan, Carl. 2019. *Contemporary Nigerian Politics: Competition in a Time of Transition and Terror*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 203.

Mohammed Yusuf was a charismatic youth leader who spoke widely throughout the north advocating for a literal interpretation of the Quran and that certain Western influences were ‘haram’ and therefore should be banned.²⁹ Yusuf was part of the Borno State Sharia Implementation Committee under Governor Kachalla and frequently spoke on radio programs advocating this belief.³⁰ The group did not have an official name, but referred to its mission as Jama’atu Ahlus Sunnah Lid Da’awati Wal Jihad, or, “People Committed to the Prophet’s Teachings for Propagation and Jihad.”³¹ Only later would they become known as Boko Haram due to their belief that western education should be forbidden, in Hausa, *Boko Haram*.³²

Sheriff is reported to have made a deal with Yusuf to secure the support of his youth movement in the election.³³ Multiple accounts of their agreement report that Sheriff promised the group strict implementation of Sharia and the position of Commissioner for Religious Affairs in exchange for their support.³⁴ Sheriff and his associates have denied this.³⁵ Sheriff would later be accused again by Stephen Davis, an Australian negotiator who negotiated with Boko Haram on behalf of the Nigerian government, of being one of the chief sponsors of Boko Haram,³⁶ an allegation, that again, Sheriff denied.³⁷ Similar to Kachalla, once elected, Sheriff allegedly reneged on his agreement with Yusuf, triggering what would grow into a critical juncture and reshape the organization of the political marketplace.

2. 2003: Boko Haram Rebukes Borno Government

Sheriff was elected governor in 2003 and he did partially fulfill his reported agreement with Yusuf. Sheriff installed Buji Foi³⁸, a local disciple of Yusuf’s, as Commissioner of Religious Affairs, and partially implemented Yusuf’s interpretation of Sharia. However, Sheriff limited the application of Sharia to social issues and did not allow traditional punishments such as beatings for theft and fornication or amputation and stoning to death for adultery.³⁹ According to Crisis Group and Smith, Yusuf interpreted this as reneging on their agreement and in 2003, began preaching against Sheriff and his administration alleging that his administration was counter to the teachings of Islam.⁴⁰ These criticisms resonated with the experience of many northern Nigerians. Northern Nigeria had a history of poverty, low levels of formal education, chronic government mismanagement, and a feeling of political and socio-economic marginalization from the rest of Nigeria, especially in contrast to the oil-rich Niger Delta and the patronage networks that flowed through the People’s Democratic Party.⁴¹

29 Crisis Group 2014, 7.

30 Crisis Group 2014, 7.

31 Mohammed, Kyari. 2014. “The Message and Methods of Boko Haram,” in *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security, and the state in Nigeria*, edited by Marc-Antoine P  rouse de Montclos, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 13.

32 Smith 2015, 80. For a deeper discussion of Boko Haram’s name and its ideological foundation, see Walker 2012.

33 Albert 2005, 96; Onuoha 2014, 166; Crisis Group 2014, 11; Smith 2015, 85; and LeVan 2019, 203.

34 Onuoha 2014, 166; Crisis Group 2014; Harnischf  ger 2014, 40.

35 Sheriff has been accused of supporting Boko Haram by multiple sources including Stephen Davis, the Australian negotiator with Boko Haram under President Goodluck Jonathan, and multiple Nigerian papers. See Sahara Reporters. 2014. “Australian Negotiator Insists Modu Sheriff, Ihejirika, Sponsor Boko Haram, Exonerates Buhari,” (August 31): <http://saharareporters.com/2014/08/31/australian-negotiator-insists-modu-sheriff-ihejirika-sponsor-boko-haram-exonerates-buhari>.

36 Sahara Reporters 2014.

37 Channels Television. 2014. “Ali Modu Sheriff Denies Sponsoring Boko Haram,” (September 3), <Accessed September 30, 2020: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pT8Zae6O5os>.

38 There are allegations that Sheriff funneled money to support Boko Haram through Buji Foi. See Crisis Group 2014, 12; Smith 2015, 85.

39 Crisis Group 2014, 12.

40 Crisis Group 2014, 12; Smith, Mike. 2015. *Boko Haram: Inside Nigeria’s Unholy War*, London: I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 85.

41 Crisis Group. 2016. “Boko Haram on the Back Foot?” Crisis Group Africa Briefing No. 120 (May 4), 9; and Smith 2015.

The details of this juncture are contested, but the overall shifts in the political marketplace are clear. In 2003, whether it was sparked by Sheriff's broken promises to Yusuf, or simply Yusuf's frustrations with the continued corruption of the Borno State government and its refusal to implement Yusuf's vision of Sharia, Yusuf increasingly delivered sermons criticizing the government calling it un-Islamic.⁴² His message focused on criticism of the government's lavish personal spending when so many in the region lived in poverty and on abuses of security forces. These grievances resonated with many across the region, including the political thugs that Sheriff reportedly abandoned after being elected.⁴³

From 2003 to 2009, Yusuf and his followers frequently clashed with security forces, and Yusuf was repeatedly jailed and released.⁴⁴ Yusuf and his followers charged that this was abuse by security forces due to their opposition to Sheriff's administration and increasingly, anything Western.⁴⁵ Sheriff's administration argued that Boko Haram was disturbing the peace and therefore the government had to respond. For example, in December 2008, Yusuf was arrested on charges of terrorism but was released on bail, allegedly after the intervention of influential members of the PDP. While there were recurrent clashes, a key point is that before 2010, violence under Yusuf's leadership was relatively limited. Mohammed writes that Yusuf even swore never to adopt a violent ideology.⁴⁶ In fact, Abubakar Shekau, a close advisor of Yusuf's, split from the group in 2002 because he felt Yusuf was too soft and would not adopt a more militant vision for the group.⁴⁷ Shekau led a 200-person splinter group into Yobe state where they would increasingly clash with neighboring communities from 2003 onward.⁴⁸ Shekau would later become a pivotal figure in the evolution of the group.

From 2003 to 2004, in contrast to the militant vision advocated by Shekau, Yusuf advocated for non-violence. At one point he argued, "that an Islamic system of government should be established in Nigeria, and if possible all over the world, but through dialogue."⁴⁹ Over time, however, Yusuf's beliefs would grow more extreme leading his mentors to disavow him, decreasing support from communities, and sparking more resistance from the government. In 2009, this came to a breaking point.

3. 2009 Clash between Boko Haram and Government Forces

One of the critical turning points in the evolution of Boko Haram occurred during a funeral procession on 11 June 2009 in the Gwange area of Maiduguri. Several members of Boko Haram are reported to have been taking the bodies of four fellow members to a cemetery to be buried when there was an altercation with the police. There are varying accounts of what started the dispute, but in the end, reports suggest that 17 members of Boko Haram were wounded, and that security agencies refused access to the wounded.⁵⁰ To Yusuf, this was a blatant example of the aggressive and heavy-handed abuse of the

42 Onuoha 2014, 166; Mohammed 2014, 18.

43 A White Paper drafted by a panel headed by Interior Minister Abba Moro is reported to have found that Boko Haram was an offshoot of militias formed during the run-up to the 2003 general elections. See Smith 2015, 84.

44 For a detailed timeline of these clashes, see Reinert, Manuel, and Lou Garçon. 2014. "Boko Haram: A Chronology," in *Boko Haram: Islamism, politics, security and the state in Nigeria*, edited by Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, Leiden: African Studies Centre, 237-245.

45 For an account of the evolution of Yusuf's beliefs, see Mohammed 2014, 9-32; and Smith 2005, 55-100.

46 Mohammed 2014, 13.

47 Crisis Group 2014, 9.

48 Crisis Group 2014, 10-14.

49 Smith 2015, 78.

50 Reports indicate that the police attempted to arrest Boko Haram members for not following the helmet law, a law which was rarely enforced leading some to argue that it was used as an excuse to harass BH members. See Mohammed 2014, 24; and Smith 2015, 93.

government. In response, Yusuf is reported to have given one of his most impassioned speeches against the government saying, “Mad soldiers. As long as they are not withdrawn from the city, there will be no peace.”⁵¹ The security agencies’ refusal for Boko Haram members to access their wounded in the hospital was seen by Yusuf and his followers as a declaration of war.⁵² A month later, the violence began.

On 26 July 2009, Boko Haram members launched the first in a four-day series of violent clashes with security forces across northeast Nigeria that would claim more than 800 lives.⁵³ Reports and videos would later emerge showing that many of the captured Boko Haram members were summarily executed.⁵⁴ During the clash, Mohammad Yusuf, Buji Foi, and Baba Fugu were arrested and all three died in police custody. Accounts are disputed, but it is believed that at least Yusuf was summarily executed.⁵⁵ Afterward, the government claimed the clash as a victory and declared Boko Haram defeated (the first declaration in what would become a repeated headline).⁵⁶ Instead of defeat, it became a transformational moment for Boko Haram.

A year later, Shekau emerged as the leader of a reinvigorated and radicalized Boko Haram, launching brutal attacks across the northeast, extending even to Abuja. Shekau framed the fight as an “all-or-nothing choice between Islam and democracy.”⁵⁷ Notably, Shekau did not often explain his Islamic doctrine but did use it as a justification for violence.⁵⁸ The July 2009 clash and alleged abuses by security forces became a rallying cry and a recruitment tool.⁵⁹ At first, Boko Haram targeted the Nigerian government, security forces, and those who had served as government informants leading up to the July 2009 clash. Under Shekau’s leadership, Boko Haram challenged the Nigerian government for control of northeastern Nigeria with assassinations of politicians and policemen, bank robberies, raids on police stations, and even prison breaks.⁶⁰ As the level of violence escalated, Shekau also justified targeting a wider set of actors, including Muslim communities that opposed the group. In December 2010, for the first time, Boko Haram specifically targeted churches in Jos and Maiduguri solely because of their religious affiliation.⁶¹ Previous attacks on churches are believed to have been motivated by efforts to target government officials whom the group had grievances with. As their targets widened, so too did their tactics. In 2011, the group increased their use of improvised explosive devices and bombing targets. This got the world’s attention when on July 26, 2011, Boko Haram bombed the United Nations compound in Abuja killing 23 and injuring 76.⁶²

51 Smith 2015, 94

52 Mohammed 2014, 24.

53 Onuoha 2014, 169; Smith 2015, 97-98; Thurston, Alex. 2016. “The disease is unbelief”: Boko Haram’s religious and political worldview, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, Analysis Paper No. 22 (January), 11.

54 Smith 2015, 98-99.

55 There have been allegations that Sheriff ordered the executions of Yusuf, Foi, and Fugu to cover up Sheriff’s direct connections to the group. Sheriff has firmly denied these allegations.

56 The government’s heavy-handed response to Boko Haram echoes past approaches taken to suppress the Maitatsine Movement, an Islamic uprising against the government in the 1980s. For a discussion of historic Islamic social movements in Nigeria, see Adesoji, Abimbola. 2018. “Islamic Social Movements and Political Unrest in Nigerian History,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics*, edited by Carl LeVan and Patrick Ukata. Oxford University Press.

57 Thurston 2016, 11.

58 Thurston 2016, 12.

59 Onuoha 2014, 169-170.

60 Thurston 2016, 17.

61 Pérouse de Montclos 2014, 136.

62 Mshelizza, Ibrahim. 2011. “Islamist sect Boko Haram claims Nigerian U.N. bombing,” Reuters. 29 August. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-bombing-claim/islamist-sect-boko-haram-claims-nigerian-u-n-bombing-idUSTRE77S3ZO20110829>.

From 2011 to 2015, violence from the Boko Haram insurgency and military counterinsurgency grew and destabilized the region.⁶³ From May 2011 to May 2015, an estimated 22,798 people⁶⁴ (10,521 members of Boko Haram; 1,318 state actors; 10,959 civilians) were killed in violence associated with Boko Haram, with the majority of attacks occurring in 2014.⁶⁵ The growing violence also triggered divisions within Boko Haram. Ansaru, also known as JAMBS, broke away in 2012 after disagreements over Boko Haram's indiscriminate use of violence.

Before 2011, the Federal Government lacked a cohesive national response to Boko Haram.⁶⁶ This coincided with a leadership vacuum at the national level and a constitutional crisis over the presidency. President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua, elected in 2007, had fallen ill in mid-2009 and many were concerned

The CJTF was formed from local vigilante groups that largely emerged as an effort by communities to protect themselves against Boko Haram given the government's inability to do so.

over his ability to fulfill the duties of the presidency.⁶⁷ After months of debates in the National Assembly and the courts over Yar'Adua's ability to continue as president, on February 9, 2010, Yar'Adua's Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, was officially made acting president.⁶⁸ Soon after, Jonathan would announce his intention to run for the presidency and in April 2011 was elected. In June 2011, Jonathan sent a Joint Task Force (JTF) comprised of military, police, immigration, and intelligence personnel to respond to Boko Haram, but saw the group more as a conspiracy to embarrass his administration than a

serious threat. The tactics of the JTF were brutal, often indiscriminate, and the violence continued to escalate. Even from the beginning, however, the military was stretched thin. Prior to the military response to Boko Haram, the military was already deployed to 30 of Nigeria's 36 states to support the police.⁶⁹

In June 2013, Jonathan declared a state of emergency in Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States, thereby giving security agencies the authority to arrest and detain any suspect, seize any building believed to be used for terrorist activity, and lock down any area of believed terrorist activity.⁷⁰ Also in June 2013, the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF) was set up by Borno state authorities for civilians to work with security forces (mostly the Army) to identify and help arrest Boko Haram members.⁷¹ The CJTF was formed from local

63 For a review of Boko Haram's escalation of tactics and attacks during this time, see Onuoha 2014, 169-175.

64 Given the difficulties in collecting information on casualties, casualty data is extremely difficult to verify and estimates range widely. This estimate is sourced from the Council on Foreign Relations Nigeria Security Tracker (Accessed 22 Sept 2020) which bases its estimate on local and international news reports. See Campbell, John. 2020. "Nigeria Security Tracker," Council on Foreign Relations, (1 August), <Accessed 22 Sept 2020>: <https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.

65 Campbell 2020.

66 There are conspiracy theories that Boko Haram was an attempt to undermine Goodluck Jonathan's presidency as revenge for the North's control of the presidency being cut short when Yar'Adua was not replaced with a northerner. See Thurston 2016.

67 LeVan 2019, 60.

68 The installment of Jonathan as acting president and his later election violated the power-rotation agreement between the North and South. Within the PDP, there was an understanding that the presidential ticket needed to include a northerner and a southerner, and that the presidency and vice presidency should rotate between the north and south (and among the geopolitical zones in each). Jonathan's installment as acting president cut the north's time as president short and is one of the key reasons that the PDP would later fracture. See LeVan 2019.

69 Obasi, Nnamdi. 2015. "The Soldiers are Less Motivated than the Boko Haram Insurgents," *SonntagsZeitung*, (January 18): <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/soldiers-are-less-motivated-boko-haram-insurgents>.

70 Sahara Reporters. 2013. "Jonathan Declares State of Emergency in Borno, Yobe and Adamawa State," (May 13): <http://saharareporters.com/2013/05/14/breaking-news-jonathan-declares-state-emergency-borno-yobe-and-adamawa-state>.

71 Amnesty International. 2015. "Stars on their Shoulders. Blood on their Hands: War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military," Report, 24.

vigilante groups that largely emerged as an effort by communities to protect themselves against Boko Haram given the government's inability to do so. From 2012 to 2015, there are widespread allegations of gross human rights abuses by Boko Haram, the Civilian Joint Task Force, and Nigerian security forces largely against civilians.⁷² These included acts of torture, forced disappearance, starvation in detention, and extrajudicial executions. Two of the worst alleged abuses during this time were the starvation of 7,000 prisoners and the extrajudicial execution of more than 640 detainees by Nigerian security forces in 2014.⁷³ These allegations prompted the International Criminal Court to open an investigation into crimes against humanity committed by both security forces and Boko Haram.⁷⁴ Amnesty International's reporting on the allegations implicated many of the top military leaders, including all three commanders of the military operation in the northeast between January 2012 and May 2014. Amnesty International also called for investigations into multiple individuals that served as Chief of Army Staff and Chief of Defense staff from 2010 to 2015.⁷⁵ These abuses deepened the grievances communities had with the government, especially with security forces.

During this period, despite the violence inflicted by security forces, little progress was made in regaining control of Borno.⁷⁶ In fact, by 2015, Boko Haram controlled large sections of territory across Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe States as well as territory in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger.⁷⁷ Their control of territory likely peaked in 2014-2015.⁷⁸ Much of the violence spike across the northeast in 2014-2015 has been attributed to Boko Haram attacks on communities and the CJTF in retaliation for aligning themselves with security forces.⁷⁹ One of the attacks that came to epitomize the gap between the government's claims of control and the true reality was the February 2014 kidnapping of the Chibok girls.⁸⁰ In the attack, 276 school girls were kidnapped from their boarding school. The military and Nigerian government were seen as failing to adequately respond or even at first acknowledge the attack. This sparked the international #bringbackourgirls campaign, a major embarrassment for Nigerian security forces and the government.⁸¹ Moreover, in late January and early February 2015 — weeks before the 2015 presidential election — Boko Haram launched two attacks seeking to gain control of Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state and one of the largest cities in the northeast region. While security forces were able to repel them, they struggled to convince the local population that Maiduguri was truly safe.⁸²

At the same time, humanitarian actors began warning of an emerging crisis. In August 2013, FEWSNET issued a warning that 8.3 million people across Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe States were likely to face a food crisis (IPC Phase 3) until the next harvest in 2013 due to limited access to markets and decreased

72 Amnesty International 2015.

73 Amnesty International 2015, 40-43.

74 ICC. 2013. "Situation in Nigeria: Article 5 Report," <https://www.icc-cpi.int/iccdocs/PIDS/docs/SAS%20-%20NGA%20-%20Public%20version%20Article%205%20Report%20-%2005%20August%202013.PDF>.

75 Amnesty International 2015, 92-93.

76 For an overview of the Jonathan administration's response to Boko Haram, see LeVan 2019, 76-80; Smith 2015, 171-201.

77 Crisis Group 2016, 3.

78 Crisis Group 2016, 3.

79 Crisis Group. 2017. "Watchmen of Lake Chad: Vigilante Groups Fighting Boko Haram," Crisis Group Africa Report No. 244 (February 23), 17.

80 LeVan 2019, 78.

81 This also set off a more than four-year secret negotiation for the girls' release. This process is extensively documented in Parkinson, Joe, and Drew Hinshaw. 2021. *Bring Back Our Girls: The Untold Story of the Global Search for Nigeria's Missing Schoolgirls*, New York: HarperCollins.

82 UNOCHA. 2015a. "Borno State Situation Report," No. 2, (February 7): https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA%20Nigeria%20SitRep2_%202015.pdf.

household income due to the ongoing insurgency and state of emergency.⁸³ An initial joint UN assessment of the northeast found that an estimated 5.97 million people across the region had been affected by the violence with two-thirds of them in Borno.⁸⁴ Limited access to much of the region, due to insecurity and military curfews, posed a significant challenge for developing a more detailed analysis. By February 6, 2015, the Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) would report that 482,286 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in Borno alone.⁸⁵

In contrast, much of the country outside the northeast was seemingly unaffected by the violence. In the capital, the Nigerian government was flush with oil revenues from a historic oil boom.⁸⁶ From 2011 to 2014, the average global price of oil ranged between \$97-110 per barrel.⁸⁷ As previously described, oil revenues have historically accounted for a majority (65-85%) of government revenues and have been a key source of political budgets.⁸⁸ While this helped fund the counterinsurgency campaign in which annual military expenditures rose to more than \$2.4 billion from 2011 to 2014, the military response was plagued by reports of an under-equipped, overextended military. Later, it would be discovered that an estimated \$2.1 billion in funds intended to procure weaponry for the fight against Boko Haram were diverted to politicians and government officials. By 2015, the price of oil would plummet to less than \$50 per barrel,⁸⁹ drastically reducing government revenues and launching the Nigerian economy into a recession. This would have major implications on the government's budget, and more importantly, on the political budgets used to secure power within the marketplace.

4. Buhari is Elected President – 2015

Muhammadu Buhari, a former military head of state from 1983 to 1985, was elected president in 2015 under the banner of the All Progressive's Party (APC), a coalition of opposition parties that had contested PDP rule since the early 2000s.⁹⁰ This marked the first peaceful transition of power between two opposing political parties in Nigeria's history. It also represented a major shift of power in the national marketplace that had ripple effects in the Borno political marketplace.

Buhari's campaign was built on two major campaign pledges—to fight corruption and to defeat Boko Haram. Within months of his May 2015 swearing-in, Buhari attempted to make progress on both. Soon after being sworn into office, Buhari ordered more than 300 investigations into the Jonathan administration and the repeated allegations that the military was under-equipped despite massive military spending.⁹¹ Eventually, Buhari's administration uncovered immense corruption under former National Security

83 OCHA. 2013a. "Humanitarian Bulletin Nigeria," Issue 4 (August): <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/NIGERIA%20-%20Humanitarian%20Bulletin%20August%202013.pdf>.

84 CHA. 2013b. "Humanitarian Bulletin Nigeria," (October) <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/HB%20Oct%20Nigeria%20FINAL.pdf>.

85 CHA. 2015a.

86 Interestingly enough, however, despite historic oil prices, oil revenues remitted to the government fell by over \$10 billion during this period. For a discussion of corruption schemes during this period, see Gilles 2020.

87 This is based on the price of Bonny Light, the crude oil produced in Nigeria. Source: Central Bank of Nigeria <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/rates/crudeoil.asp>.

88 Despite the oil boom of 2011-2014, oil revenues remitted to the Federal Account from the NNPC actually decreased from 2010 to 2013. For a detailed account of corruption schemes during this period, see Gillies, Alexandra. 2020. *Crude Intentions: How Oil Corruption Contaminates the World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

89 The average price of Bonny Light in 2015 was \$48.81. Source: Central Bank of Nigeria, (n.d). "Crude Oil Price (US\$/Barrel), Production (mbd) and Export (mbd)," Accessed 15 September 2020. <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/rates/crudeoil.asp>.

90 For an analysis of how Buhari won, see Owen, Olly, and Zainab Usman. 2015. "Briefing: Why Goodluck Jonathan Lost the Nigerian Presidential Election of 2015." *African Affairs*. no. 114 (456): 445-471; and LeVan 2019.

91 Crisis Group 2016, 7

Adviser, Sambo Dasuki, in what became known as the “Armssgate” or Dasukigate” scandal. Dasuki is alleged to have funneled more than \$2.1 billion intended for arms procurement to himself and his political allies between 2007 and 2015.⁹² Other high-level officials including the former Chief of Defense Staff and Air Chief Marshall, and more than 241 organizations were also implicated. Outside of the Sani Abacha and Ibrahim Babangida regimes, Dasukigate is one of the single largest known corruption scandals in Nigeria’s history, and as Perlo-Freeman writes, what is perhaps most striking about it was that it was uncovered at all.⁹³ Historically, the military had “been immune” from prosecution for corruption.⁹⁴ While Buhari’s initial actions to challenge impunity for corruption within the military were promising, civil society activists charge that he has always not applied the same scrutiny to his own military heads.

Buhari also committed to transforming the Nigerian government’s response to Boko Haram. Symbolically, he changed the name of the military operation from Operation Zaman Lafiya (We will live in peace) to Operation Lafiya Dole (Peace by *all means*), a name that came to signify much of the military’s response.⁹⁵ Upon assuming office, Buhari made several immediate changes to the military response. First, he changed the commander and moved the operation headquarters from Abuja to Maiduguri thereby improving logistics, wage payment, air support, and rotation of troops and procurement.⁹⁶ Second, Buhari reinvigorated the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a partnership with Cameroon and Niger, which acted more as a mechanism for coordination and cross-border operations than as an integrated task force.⁹⁷ Buhari had given the Nigerian Army until the end of 2015 to defeat Boko Haram and he expected results. As the name of the operation implied, however, these results often came at a heavy cost, and allegations of human rights abuses continued to plague military operations.

While the military’s response had been heavy-handed, Buhari saw it as also achieving results. On December 24, 2015, Buhari declared a ‘technical victory’ over Boko Haram.⁹⁸ He argued that Boko Haram was no longer able to launch conventional attacks, an argument that held true in 2016. After 2015, Boko Haram’s attacks shifted to being more about extracting resources and targeting soft targets, rather than holding territory.⁹⁹

Despite, and partially due to Buhari’s efforts, much of the damage that led to the food security crisis had already been done. Boko Haram attacks, in combination with the military’s heavy-handed response, limits on certain economic activities (e.g. sale of fertilizer and fuel, access to markets and farms), and a delayed rainy season had triggered widespread displacement, interrupted access to markets, and destroyed food production and livestock trade in many parts of the region.¹⁰⁰ By May 2015, FEWS NET

92 Dasuki was eventually charged by the EFCC with three others on 25 counts of criminal breach of trust and misappropriation of N19.2 billion (approximately \$68 million). Dasuki was held in custody without bail from his arrest in 2015 until December 2019. As of June 2020, the trial is ongoing. For more information, see Ezezi, Dennis. 2019. “Sambo Dasuki regains freedom after four years in detention,” *The Guardian*, (December 24): <https://guardian.ng/news/sambo-dasuki-regains-freedom-after-four-years-in-detention/>; and Premium Times. 2020. “Alleged \$2.1bn arms deal: 78 companies collected money from ex-NSA Dasuki without executing contracts—witness,” (March 14): <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/381705-alleged-2-1bn-arms-deal-78-companies-collected-money-from-ex-nsa-dasuki-without-executing-contacts-witness.html>.

93 Perlo-Freeman, Samuel. 2017. “Nigeria’s Armssgate Scandal.” Somerville: World Peace Foundation. [Accessed 24 June 2020] <https://sites.tufts.edu/corruptarmsdeals/nigerias-armssgate-scandal/>, 7.

94 Ibid.

95 Crisis Group 2016, 7.

96 Crisis Group 2016, 7.

97 Crisis Group 2016, 8.

98 BBC, 2015.

99 Crisis Group 2016.

100 UNOCHA. 2015b. “Humanitarian Bulletin Nigeria,” (May): <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Nigeria%20HB2>.

reported that an estimated three million people were likely to experience food stress (IPC-2) or crisis (IPC-3) in the northeast during the coming months (see Table 1 for explanation of IPC scales).¹⁰¹ In Borno, FEWSNET reported that almost the entire population of Borno was expected to be in crisis until the main harvest in October 2015. In IDP camps, the situation was more critical. FEWS NET reported that IDP settlement areas in Maiduguri (the largest concentration of IDPs in the state) were expected to experience emergency or severe food insecurity (IPC-4) during the lean season (July–October 2015). At this time, the airport in Borno was closed and access was limited in 20 out of the 27 LGAs in Borno.¹⁰² By December 2015, the number of recorded IDPs rose from under 390,000 in December 2014, to almost 2.2 million, with the majority seeking refuge in host communities in Maiduguri, Borno.¹⁰³ While the crisis had been growing for a while, evidence began emerging of the extent of the crisis. In 2016, evidence of the crisis prompted a massive response from the international community.

Table 1: Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) Scales

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Priority Response Objectives</i>
Phase 1 None/Minimal	Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Action required to build resilience and for disaster risk reduction.
Phase 2 Stressed	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Action required for disaster risk reduction and to protect livelihoods.
Phase 3 Crisis	Households either: 1) Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or 2) Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Urgent action required to: Protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps
Phase 4 Emergency	Households either: 1) Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or 2) Are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Urgent action required to: Save lives and livelihoods.
Phase 5 Catastrophe/ Famine	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution, and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. For Famine Classification, an area needs to have extreme critical levels of malnutrition and mortality.	Urgent action required to: Revert/prevent widespread death and total collapse of livelihoods.

Source: IPC 2022.

5. International Humanitarian Aid and Response Scales – 2016

The Borno political marketplace was fundamentally altered by the massive scaling of the humanitarian response in 2016, but the ongoing counterinsurgency was a closely interrelated factor. The result of these dynamics was a crisis that was profitable to some, and deadly to others.

[pdf.](#)

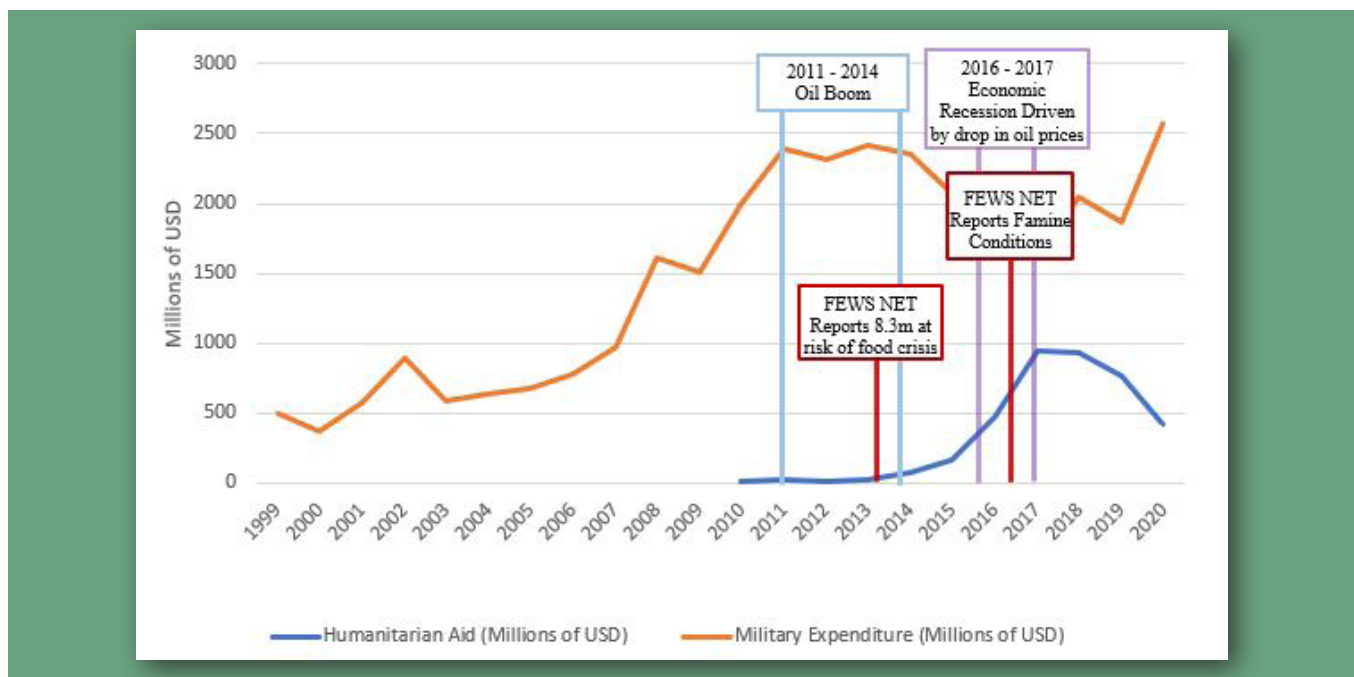
101 Ibid.

102 Ibid.

103 UNOCHA. 2015c. “Humanitarian Bulletin Nigeria,” (December): https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/nigeria_hb_december_2015_1.pdf.

In 2016, in response to the evidence of the humanitarian crisis, the UN launched an appeal for over \$1 billion in humanitarian aid. Previous UN appeals and requests from the Nigerian government for aid had totaled less than \$200 million per year. Since 2016, more than \$3.8 billion in aid¹⁰⁴ has flowed into Nigeria, though, on average, this accounted for approximately two-thirds of the estimated need each year.¹⁰⁵ The rapid scaling of aid also brought a proliferation of international actors on the ground in the northeast. Before 2016, IDP camps were primarily operated by the military, as well as national and state emergency management agencies (NEMA and SEMA), but were poorly resourced, and conditions were brutal.¹⁰⁶ After 2016, more than 80 local and INGOs were had set up operations in the northeast. 2016 also marked the year that the International Organization for Migration (IOM) established a series of humanitarian hubs to expand its presence beyond Maiduguri.¹⁰⁷

Figure 2: Nigerian Military Expenditure and Humanitarian Aid (1999 – 2020)



Sources: OCHA, Humanitarian Aid data from Financial Tracking Service; Military expenditure data from World Bank, World Development Indicators, 2020.

The goal of humanitarian actors was to quickly scale up operations, however, insecurity caused both by Boko Haram attacks and the government’s response created major access barriers. In February 2016, Boko Haram used children, adolescents, and women—many of whom were forced or hoping to escape—as bomb carriers¹⁰⁸

104 UNOCHA. 2020b. “Humanitarian Aid data from Financial Tracking Service,” <Accessed September 24, 2020>: <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/163/summary/2020>.

105 Maxwell, Daniel, Peter Hailey, Jeeyon Janet Kim, Erin McCloskey, and Maria Wrabel. 2018. “Constraints and Complexities of Information and Analysis in Humanitarian Emergencies: Evidence from Nigeria. Boston: Feinstein International Center, Tufts University, 10.

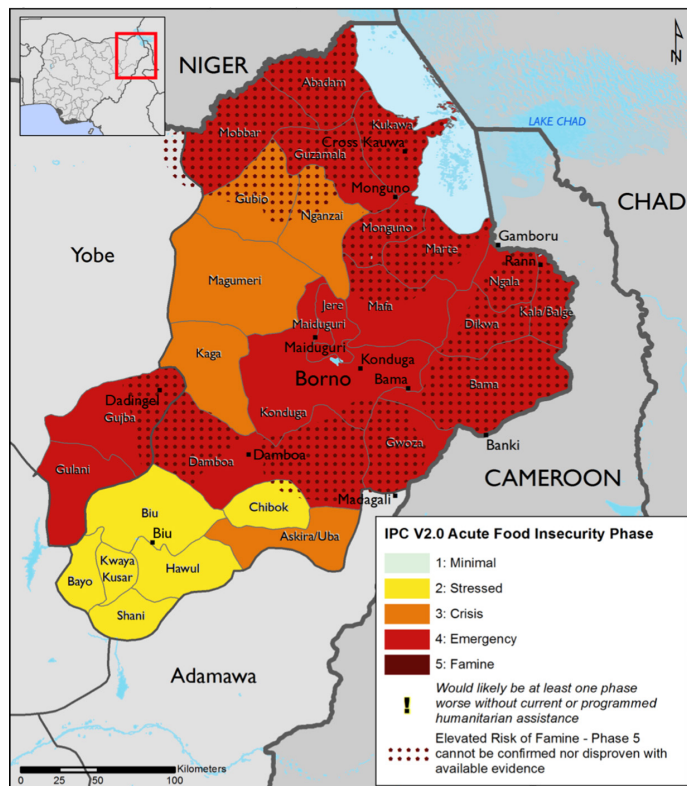
106 Crisis Group. 2017, 6. Matfess, Hilary. 2018. *Women and the War on Boko Haram: Wives, Weapons, Witnesses*. Malden: Zed Books, 145-190.

107 Stoddard, Abby, et. al. 2020. “Humanitarian Access SCORE Report: Northeast Nigeria: Survey on the Coverage, Operational Reach, and Effectiveness of Humanitarian Aid,” Humanitarian Outcomes, (January): https://www.humanitarianoutcomes.org/sites/default/files/publications/score_ne_nigeria_01_2020.pdf, 5-6.

108 “Bomb carriers” is used in place of the more common label of ‘suicide bomber’ to emphasize the point that many of these individuals

targeting soft targets, including IDP camps.¹⁰⁹ Bombings occurred on an almost daily basis. During this time, Abu Musab al-Barnawi, Mohammed Yusuf's son, was appointed as the new leader of Boko Haram by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, the leader of ISIS.¹¹⁰ This triggered a new split in the group into a faction of Boko Haram led by Abubakar Shekau¹¹¹, and the Islamic State in West African Province (ISWAP, led by al-Barnawi). In Borno, the UN reported that its movement was restricted in approximately 88 percent of the State.¹¹² While humanitarian actors worked to scale operations, insecurity, displacement, and a lack of humanitarian access hampered the response and exacerbated food insecurity.

Figure 3: Food Security Outcomes by LGA in Borno State, November 2016



Source: FEWS NET 2016, 27.

In August 2016, the first conditions of famine in Borno were reported by Cadre Harmonisé.¹¹³ Their assessment estimated that 4.5 million people across the northeast faced acute food insecurity and required immediate assistance. In addition, they found that evidence that 65,000 individuals had been in famine-like conditions in Borno and Yobe, but their data did not meet the threshold to declare a famine. A key challenge was that only a few of the LGAs in Borno were accessible at that time to emergency teams.¹¹⁴ FEWS NET would later report that famine likely occurred in Bama and Banki towns during 2016 and that an estimated 2,000 famine-related deaths may have occurred between January and September 2016.¹¹⁵ FEWS NET also reported that famine may have also occurred and may have been ongoing in inaccessible parts of Borno during 2016, but that not enough information was available to determine whether it was or not.¹¹⁶ This is a reflection of both the ongoing access challenges, as well as the also potential political influences in the assessment process (discussed in section three of the paper).¹¹⁷

carrying the bombs had no choice in the matter and were not ideologically driven martyrs. This distinction comes from Maxwell Saun-gweme, former Nigeria Deputy Country Director for Search for Common Ground.

109 UNOCHA. 2016a. "Lake Chad Basin: Crisis Update," No. 1, (February): <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Lake%20Chad%20Basin%20Crisis%20Update.pdf>.

110 Boko Haram's pledged allegiance to the Islamic State is arguably driven by an attempt to get foreign support at a moment when their power was declining in Nigeria. See Thurston 2016, 24.

111 Shekau would eventually be killed after self-detonating an explosive device in 2021 during a clash between the two factions. See Reuters. 2021. "Boko Haram cleric confirms Shekau's death, urges fighters' loyalty." *Reuters*. 19 June. <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/boko-haram-cleric-confirms-shekaus-death-urges-fighters-loyalty-2021-06-18/>.

112 UNOCHA. 2016a.

113 UNOCHA. 2016b. "Humanitarian Bulletin Nigeria North-East," (August).

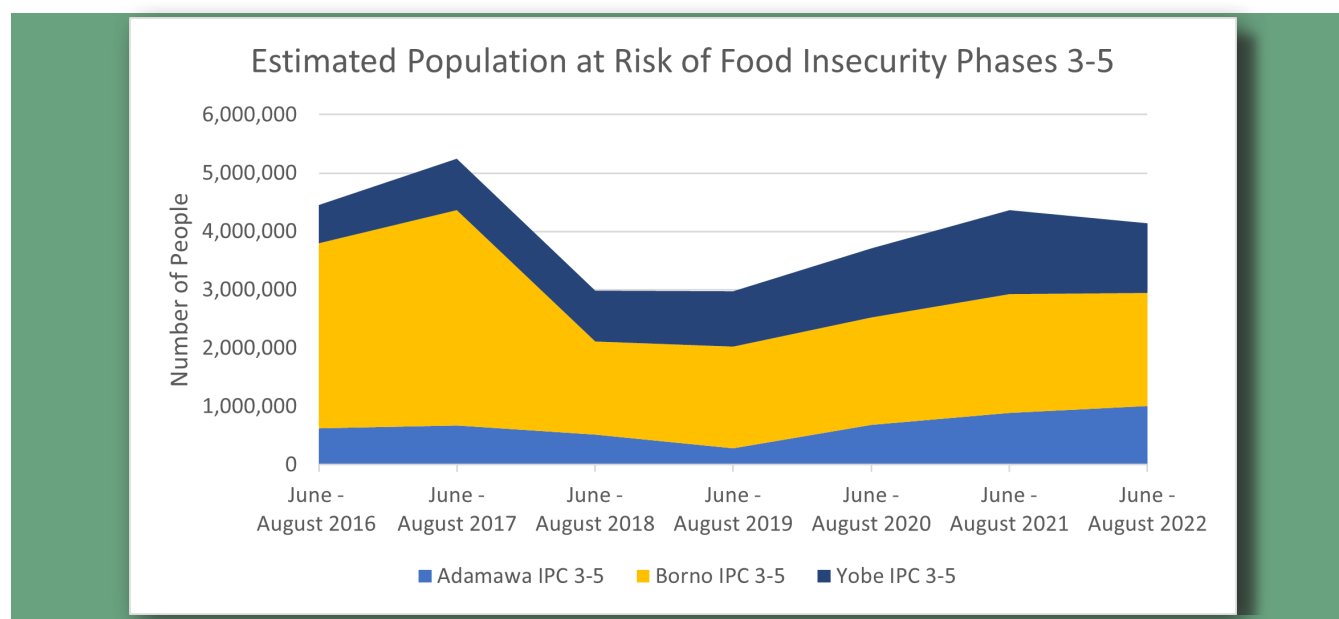
114 UNOCHA. 2016b.

115 FEWSNET. 2016. Press Release: A famine likely occurred in Bama LGA and May be ongoing in inaccessible areas of Borno State," (December 13): https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/FEWS%20NET%20Borno%20%20Analysis_20161213release.pdf.

116 FEWSNET. 2016, 1.

117 For a detailed analysis of the pressures on data food security analysis during this time, see Maxwell 2018.

Since 2016, Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa have been plagued by food insecurity (IPC phases 3-5). While the highest levels of food insecurity occurred in 2017, overall, more than three million people have remained at risk of food insecurity from 2016 to 2022.



Sources: CILSS Reports 2016 – 2022.¹¹⁸

At times, such as in 2017, some communities in the northeast were at risk of famine.¹¹⁹ Ongoing attacks by Boko Haram (and other non-state armed groups such as ISWAP) and the military’s counterinsurgency operations have been a continued challenge to humanitarian operations, the restoration of livelihoods, and perpetuated displacement. At times, the violence and fighting over territory left large sections of the state inaccessible to humanitarian organizations.¹²⁰ These dynamics were only exacerbated by the supply issues and rising food costs caused by the COVID-19 pandemic that heightened food insecurity from 2020 to 2022.¹²¹

A Shift in Military Strategy and an Entrenchment of a Crisis Economy

As the marketplace has stabilized, there is evidence that the army’s garrison town strategy, now associated with the ‘Super Camp’ strategy, has helped entrench a crisis economy in Borno. Against the backdrop of mounting casualties, displacement of civilians¹²², and challenges in holding territory against Boko Haram, in 2019 the Nigerian Army decided to concentrate its forces in fortified towns where it would establish

¹¹⁸ This data comes from CILSS estimates of the population at risk of food insecurity phases 3 through 5 during the lean season, June through August of each year. The estimates for the population at risk of food insecurity varies as numbers were frequently revised across reports. The reports used for these calculations include: CILSS 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022. The full source information is available in the references section.

¹¹⁹ UNOCHA. 2017. “Nigeria - North-East: humanitarian emergency Situation Report No. 10,” (April 30):https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/OCHA%20SitRep%20%2310_DRAFT%203.pdf.

¹²⁰ Crisis Group 2017, 5.

¹²¹ CILSS 2020; CILSS 2021; CILSS 2022.

¹²² From November 2017 to July 2018, nearly 185,000 individuals across Borno and Adamawa were displaced, an increase due to military operations. See UNOCHA, August 2018: <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/north-east-nigeria-humanitarian-situation-update-progress-key-activities-2018-3>.

IDP camps (‘super camps’) and land for farming.¹²³ A fundamental challenge was that the military had historically struggled to secure many of the towns selected to become garrison towns.¹²⁴ The logic was that by concentrating forces in these towns, they would be able to provide greater security and use them to launch forward attacks against Boko Haram. However, the withdrawal to these towns created a vacuum, which was quickly filled by Boko Haram fighters,¹²⁵ and entrenched a crisis economy.

The garrison towns and super camps are the few areas of the state outside Maiduguri where humanitarian actors had access in 2019 and 2020. Although the government claimed to be in control of the majority of Borno state, and UNOCHA maps reported some access to as many as 23 of the 27 LGAs, some humanitarian actors reported that access was largely limited to the garrison towns leaving as much as 85 percent of the state inaccessible.¹²⁶ In addition, from late September 2019 to early 2020, the Nigerian government increasingly exerted control over humanitarian actors in two key ways—increasing federal and state oversight of operations (e.g. December 2019 Borno Bill), and military limits on humanitarian operations. The government argued that these were necessary to ensure the coordination and efficacy of aid and to ensure that it is not used to support Boko Haram. To some extent, these claims echo criticisms from communities that some humanitarian actors are engaged in corruption. Critics, however, charged that it severely limited the ability of humanitarian organizations to operate, challenged their independence vis-à-vis the government, and opened the door to exploitation by self-interested actors.¹²⁷ In addition, given the military’s control over the garrison towns, there was a multitude of opportunities for military actors to leverage the humanitarian aid to generate rents for themselves. These include exploiting vendor contracting systems for transporting goods, controlling fishing and agriculture production in the northeast, as well as the historic diversion and selling of foodstuffs.¹²⁸ In addition, humanitarian actors report that making aid available only in garrison towns has been part of a larger strategy to lure people out of Boko Haram areas and create free-fire zones for the military to operate in, raising major concerns over political manipulation of the humanitarian response.

Since taking office, Zulum has developed a reputation for implementing relief and development projects while prioritizing accountability and anti-corruption.

The culmination of these events perpetuated a crisis and created immense humanitarian challenges. Food insecure Nigerians were dependent on the aid only being provided in garrison towns (that the military was repeatedly charged with exploiting), and humanitarian organizations were left with the option to provide the aid, knowing that it may be politically manipulated or part of a military strategy, or risk people going without critical relief supplies.

Governor Zulum: Marketplace turbulence or something more?

The final source of turbulence that may prove to be a critical juncture in the Borno Marketplace in the long run is the election of Babagana Zulum as governor in May 2019. Zulum was tapped by Borno State

123 Kurtzer, Jacob. 2020. “Out of Sight: Northeast Nigeria’s Humanitarian Crisis.” Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 13-19

124 Kurtzer 2020, 14.

125 Stoddard et. al 2020, 9.

126 HRW 2020.

127 Kurtzer 2020; and HRW 2020.

128 Kurtzer 2020, 20.

Governor Kashim Shettima to succeed him on the APC ticket and Zulum also received strong support from communities and traditional leaders.¹²⁹ Zulum served as the Commissioner for Reconstruction under Shettima and was seen as a government actor who had connections to development organizations and had a community-informed understanding of the conflict dynamics. Zulum's APC nomination was met with skepticism by some local politicians who did not believe that Zulum would be able to withstand political pressure from individuals such as Ali Modu Sheriff, a Borno godfather.¹³⁰

Since arriving in office, Zulum has not shied away from challenging existing power brokers, politicians, and even the military when he saw them as not fulfilling their duties to protect and rebuild Borno. For example, in May 2020, Zulum went on an unannounced tour of local governments and publicly criticized the local government chairmen who were not in the Local Government Areas (LGAs) performing their duties.¹³¹ Not unrelated, Local Government elections were held on November 28, 2020, for the first time in 13 years. Zulum has also openly criticized the military and voiced allegations of corruption that community members have long held.

This criticism is perhaps best exemplified by his comments following the July 28, 2020 attack on his armed convoy. En route to visit Baga, a town near Lake Chad along the Chadian border, Zulum's caravan was attacked by unknown gunmen and was forced to return to Maiduguri. Upon his return to Maiduguri, Zulum held a press conference in which he publicly criticized the military for its inability to secure an area only 5km from one of their bases.¹³² Zulum has also publicly stated his suspicions that the counterinsurgency is being internally sabotaged by corruption within the Army.¹³³ There are allegations that the military is operating illegal fishing and farming operations near Baga, a historic source of fish for the region and Nigeria. The Army has denied these allegations and has announced that it will investigate the allegations.¹³⁴ While the rhetoric coming from the Army about accountability is strong, the Army does not have a strong record of investigating itself or punishing those found to be involved in abuses.

Since taking office, Zulum has developed a reputation for implementing relief and development projects while prioritizing accountability and anti-corruption. In 2021, President Mohammed Bazoum of Niger even awarded Zulum Niger's second highest honor, 'de Grande Officer dans l'Ordre', for Zulum's efforts to stabilize and rebuild the Lake Chad Basin.¹³⁵ Zulum's tenure, however, has not been without critique. The 2019 audit of the state ministries showed approximately N414 million (approximately \$1.1 million) of expenses without proper documentation, though Zulum pledged to investigate these expenses and ensure that the ministries produce the necessary documentation for them.¹³⁶ While Zulum's tenure

129 Idris, Hamza, 2018. "Nigeria: Borno Gov'ship- 'Shettima Settles for Zulum Ahead of APC Primaries,'" *The Daily Trust*, (September 26): <https://allafrica.com/stories/201809260066.html>

130 Idris 2018.

131 Marama, Ndahi. 2020. "Ranking LG Officials Absent as Zulum Takes Roll Call in Surprise Visit to Chibok, 5 other secretariats," *Vanguard*, (May 22): <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/05/ranking-lg-officials-absent-as-zulum-takes-roll-call-in-surprise-visit-to-chibok-5-other-secretariats/>

132 Sahara Reporters. 2020. "Furious Borno Governor, Zulum, Blasts Nigerian Army over Convoy Attack in Baga," (July 30): <http://saharareporters.com/2020/07/30/furious-borno-governor-zulum-blasts-nigerian-army-over-convoy-attack-baga>.

133 Ross, Will. 2020. "Nigeria Boko Haram: Governor Says Battle Against Militants Being Sabotaged," *BBC*, (August 2): <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-53632643>

134 Olugbode, Michael. 2020. "Amy Probes Soldiers' Alleged Involvement in Illegal Fishing, Farming," *This Day Live*, (August 13): <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2020/08/13/army-probes-soldiers-alleged-involvement-in-illegal-fishing-farming/>.

135 The Nation. 2021. "Zulum get's Niger's second-highest honour," *The Nation*, 4 August. <https://thenationonline.net/zulum-gets-nigers-second-highest-honour/>; Ibrahim, Hassan. 2022. "National Honours: Buhari Approves CON for Zulum," *Daily Trust*. 30 September. <https://dailytrust.com/national-honours-buhari-approves-con-for-zulum>.

136 Bunu, Yunusa. 2022. "Exclusive: Under Zulum, Borno can't account for N414 million," *Premium Times*, 2 July. <https://www.premi->

as governor stands in contrast to previous administrations, only time will tell if Zulum will successfully alter the dynamics of the political marketplace in Borno or if his tenure will simply be turbulence.

Part 3: Interplay between the Humanitarian Response and the Political Marketplace

Since the humanitarian response began in 2014, there has been an interplay between the response and political marketplace dynamics that has altered the shape of each and has had lasting consequences. This section outlines how each has affected the other.

How the Political Market Shaped the Humanitarian Response

As epitomized in the events of 2019 to 2020, the political market has fundamentally shaped the humanitarian response since it began in 2016. This section outlines the three critical ways this has happened.

Government Oversight and Control of Humanitarian Operations

One of the fundamental principles of many of the humanitarian organizations operating in Borno is independence, though this is something the Nigerian government has never fully granted these actors. Since the international community scaled humanitarian operations in 2016, the Nigerian government has limited humanitarian operations to areas in government control and officially prohibited organizations from negotiating (e.g. for access) with Boko Haram. Humanitarian actors have been faced with the decision to accept these conditions or simply not operate. This has limited the ability to fully assess food insecurity and provide needed aid to the hundreds of thousands estimated to be in areas outside government control.¹³⁷ In 2019, the Nigerian Army briefly suspended Mercy Corps and Action Against Hunger allegedly because it suspected they might be supporting Boko Haram.¹³⁸ The allegations were later withdrawn and both organizations were reinstated.

While there is an argument for attempting to prevent humanitarian aid from being co-opted by Boko Haram and the other armed groups operating in the region, an argument bolstered by Boko Haram's targeting of humanitarian actors¹³⁹, evidence has suggested that the more common leakage of aid has been by local government and security actors (see pages 23-24). Given March 2020 reports that the government-controlled less than 85 percent of territory in Borno, continued government limits on humanitarian operations risks entrenching the current crisis status quo, though some allege that this is the intention.¹⁴⁰ INGOs reported that by early 2020 (before the pandemic) the crisis in northeastern Nigeria was no longer a priority for Nigeria's key international allies that provided substantial support (notably the United States). The implication is that INGOs and UN Agencies lacked the diplomatic support that could be leveraged to negotiate greater access. Humanitarian actors focused on doing what they could, where they

umtimesng.com/regional/nnorth-east/540371-exclusive-under-zulum-borno-cant-account-for-n414-million.html.

137 CILSS 2022.

138 Akwagyiram, Alexis. 2019. "Mercy Corps Suspends Northeast Nigeria work after army shuts offices," *Reuters*, (25 September): <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security/mercy-corps-suspends-northeast-nigeria-work-after-army-shuts-offices-idUSKBN1WB04B>.

139 UNCHR. 2020b. "Nigeria: Population of Concern Snapshot," (August): https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNHCR%20Nigeria%20-%20POC%20Snapshot_August%202020.pdf.

140 Munshi, Neil. 2018. "Under Fire: Why Nigeria is Struggling to Defeat Boko Haram," *Financial Times*. (Dec. 6).

could, but recognized that there were countless they could not reach.

The Politics of Crisis Analysis

Limited access has also hindered the ability to accurately analyze the humanitarian crisis meaning that analyses, especially of food insecurity, are likely understated and quickly outdated. This is not a challenge unique to Nigeria, but it is worth considering due to the politicization of access. This was extensively documented by Maxwell et al. in 2018, but it is a problem that has persisted.¹⁴¹ In 2020, partially due to the ‘garrison town’ strategy, government control of territory shrunk to perhaps a level not seen since before 2015. In late 2020, humanitarian actors increasingly faced attacks on previously well-traveled roads. Given the government’s prohibition for humanitarian actors to go to areas outside government control without government escorts, this creates a major limit to accurately assessing the current crisis. At the same time, estimates of individuals needing humanitarian aid, and those facing food insecurity (IPC 2-5), continued to rise throughout 2020 and 2021.¹⁴²

Government Control of the Narrative

There is no better example of the Nigerian government’s commitment to its control of the narrative than its repeated claims of victory over Boko Haram beginning in 2009 and continuing to the present. Buhari’s 2015 statement that Boko Haram was ‘technically defeated’ and could no longer launch conventional attacks has held some truth, but Boko Haram’s asymmetric attacks have continued to devastate the region. Independent reporting on this is extremely limited. The Nigerian government has increasingly clamped down on independent access to information about the ongoing counterinsurgency and judgments about whether or not it is succeeding. The Army spokesman is often the sole source of reports about battles and casualty rates, and journalists are left with no evidence to factcheck outlandish reports. Instead, journalists have faced immense pressure to portray a positive image of the Army’s operations against Boko Haram.¹⁴³ In July 2021, Nigeria’s National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) issued a letter to media houses across the country instructing them not to give “details of either the security issues or victims of these security challenges so as not to jeopardize the efforts of the Nigerian soldiers and other security agents.”¹⁴⁴ The Nigerian government’s clampdown on the press is not limited to Boko Haram, but to media reports that are seen to criticize or undermine the government. Reporters without Borders ranks Nigeria 120 out of 180 countries for press freedom and notes that it is “one of West Africa’s most dangerous and difficult countries for journalists, who are often spied on, attacked, arbitrarily arrested or even killed.”¹⁴⁵ One Nigerian journalist described these dynamics writing “[the] suppression of Nigerian media seems to be a desperate attempt to keep Nigerians in the dark about how little the government has been able to deliver on its promises to curb insecurity.”¹⁴⁶ In addition to clamping down on the media, the government has also fostered alternate narratives to support its own position by sponsoring what some argue are ‘fake NGOs’ to create the impression of civil society’s support of the government.¹⁴⁷

141 Maxwell et al. 2018.

142 The Cadre Harmonise September 2020 update reported that the number of people in need as a result of the pandemic rose from 3.7 million to 4.3 million. UNOCHA reports in February 2021 increased the number to 5.1 million.

143 Wodu, Nkasi. 2021. “Nigerian Press Freedom in Grave Danger,” *Council on Foreign Relations* [blog]. 19 August. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/nigerian-press-freedom-grave-danger>.

144 Akinpelu, Yusuf. 2021. “NBC asks broadcasting stations to stop reporting details of insecurity incidents, victims,” *Premium Times*. 18 July. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/474357-nbc-asks-broadcasting-stations-to-stop-reporting-details-of-insecurity-incidents-victims.html>.

145 Reporters without Borders. (n.d.) *Nigeria*. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://rsf.org/en/nigeria>.

146 Wodu 2021.

147 Page, Matthew. 2021. *Fake Civil Society: The Rise of Pro-Government NGOs in Nigeria*. Carnegie Endowment for International

These ‘fake NGOs’ hold press events echoing the government’s position, praising the government, and attacking its opponents. Here, Page provides an illustrative example:

“In 2018, following a series of military defeats, another pro-government NGO held a press conference to advocate that the Nigerian army should maintain its ‘winning spirit’ in the fight against Boko Haram, assessing that ‘the Nigerian military has continued to rout the terrorists albeit with the occasional sacrifice to the fatherland’.”¹⁴⁸

Estimates of lives lost in the insurgency in 2018 indicate that the ‘occasional sacrifice’ paid by security forces was equivalent if not greater than that paid by Boko Haram fighters and amounted to more than a thousand lives.¹⁴⁹

Overall, the Nigerian government has sought to control the narrative around the insurgency and ‘success’ of the counterinsurgency, while simultaneously promoting an alternative narrative that at times is detached from reality. This is not to say that the government has not made progress at times in the fight against Boko Haram, but ‘success’ narratives are often overstated with little room for independent verification or critique. This tight control over the narrative of the ongoing counterinsurgency campaign also extends to humanitarian actors who fear publishing press releases or reports that directly criticize the government.

How the Humanitarian Response has Shaped the Political Market

There is perhaps no bigger impact of the humanitarian response on the political market other than how it has reshaped the political economy of the marketplace and opened new sources of political budgets. There are reports that the humanitarian crisis is fueling political budgets through multiple mechanisms including 1) diverting humanitarian aid; 2) continued flow of security rents and security votes; 3) development rents; and 4) illicit trade and smuggling.

Diversion of Humanitarian Aid

Since the humanitarian response began in earnest in 2016, there have been consistent reports of actors—both local governments as well as members of international humanitarian organizations—diverting aid. These include questions from communities on where the Nigerian government’s reported \$2 billion in humanitarian aid went in 2016,¹⁵⁰ perennial reports of international aid diversion from 2016 to the present,¹⁵¹ and continue to be one of the key critical food materials that are not reaching their intended recipients in Borno.¹⁵² Local officials, as well as members of INGOs and UN Agencies, are implicated. In 2017, a Nigerian presidential spokesman publicly admitted he believed that more than 50 percent of aid sent by the government to northeast Nigeria had been diverted.¹⁵³ This was at a time when 1.5 million

Peace. Washington, DC.

148 Page 2021, 13. The NGO’s statement is from Vanguard. (2018). “Boko Haram: Nigerian Army Charged to Sustain Winning Spirit Against Insurgents,” *Vanguard*, 11 November. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2018/11/boko-haram-nigerian-army-charged-to-sustain-winning-spirit-against-insurgents/>.

149 Campbell 2020.

150 Crisis Group 2017, 6.

151 Crisis Group 2017, 6.

152 Stoddard et al. 2020, 7.

153 Adetayo, Olalekan. 2017. “Half of IDPs’ food diverted—Presidency,” *Punch*, 18 June. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://punchng.com/half-of-idps-food-diverted-presidency/>;

people were believed to be on the brink of famine.¹⁵⁴ An example from Yobe State, the second-worst hit by the crisis, illustrates the severity of this. A United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR) IDP protection monitor reported that relief materials destined for a northern part of Yobe at the end of Ramadan in 2016 were stolen by a local official who distributed them to other politicians, associates, and cronies in the area. The UNHCR IDP protection monitor believed that less than half of the materials actually made it to the intended IDPs.¹⁵⁵ The government pledged to address the diversions, and progress has been made, but aid continued to go missing.

Since the conflict began, more than \$3.8 billion in international aid has flowed into the northeast.¹⁵⁶ In 2020, UNOCHA estimated that \$1.1 billion was needed to provide necessary humanitarian aid to an estimated 7.8 million people, 3.8 million of whom needed food security assistance.¹⁵⁷ The diversion of humanitarian aid is not unique to Nigeria,¹⁵⁸ but it has become part of the political economy of the northeast and has created vested interests in a continued crisis.

Shift to Development

Humanitarian actors report immense pressure to shift the narrative, and the corresponding agenda, from humanitarian response to development despite the continued insecurity or lack of government control. This is a call that is shared by both the Nigerian government and Nigerians in the northeast, though their reasons are likely very different. Some sought a return to normal life while others may have seen it as an opportunity to use development rents to fund their political budgets. Regardless of the motivation, collective calls to shift to development also came with an input of funds for rebuilding.

In 2018, the Nigerian government inaugurated the North East Development Commission (NEDC). This replaced the Presidential Initiative on the North East (PINE) and the Victims Support Fund (VSF). While many have perceived the NEDC as simply a rebranding and shakeup of the existing agencies charged with rebuilding the North East, a notable change was the NEDC's federally mandated budget allocation. Similar to the federal allocation structure of the Niger Delta Development Commission, the NEDC is directly allocated three percent of all government revenues, a significant amount of money. In its first year of operation in 2019, the NEDC was allocated N55 billion (approximately \$151.9 million).¹⁵⁹ The North East and Niger Delta are the only two regions in Nigeria to have such federally constituted regional development agencies. The NEDC's track record, however, is shrouded in allegations of corruption, much like the NDDC.¹⁶⁰ For example, in July 2020, allegations emerged that N100 billion (approximately

154 Reuters Staff. 2017. "Nigeria says half of government food aid never reached victims of Boko Haram." *Reuters*. 18 June. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-security/nigeria-says-half-of-government-food-aid-never-reached-victims-of-boko-haram-idUSKBN1990OH>.

155 Alqali, Adam. 2016. "Nigeria: When Aid Goes Missing," Institute for War and Peace Reporting. 5 September 2016. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/nigeria-when-aid-goes-missing> or <https://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-when-aid-goes-missing>.

156 UNOCHA. 2020b. "Humanitarian Aid data from Financial Tracking Service," <Accessed September 24, 2020>: <https://fts.unocha.org/countries/163/summary/2020>.

157 UNOCHA 2020, September

158 For a broader discussion on the manipulation of humanitarian aid, see de Waal, Alex 1997. *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa*, London: The International African Institute, 133-158.

159 Umoru, Henry. 2019. "North East Commission Presents N55b Budget as Take Off." *Vanguard*, April 10. <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/04/north-east-commission-presents-n55b-budget-as-take-off/>.

160 Since its creation in 2000, it has been dogged by allegations of corruption. For example, at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, the NDDC governing board is accused of giving out a total of N1.5 billion (approximately \$3.9 million) to staff as "palliatives." In contrast, N475 million (approximately \$1.25 million) was given to police in the Niger Delta to buy face masks and protective personal equipment. See Sahara Reporters, 2020. "We Used N1.5bn to take care of ourselves as COVID-19 Palliative, Says NDDC MD, Pon-

\$257 million) may have been embezzled from the NEDC in a scheme that implicates the NEDC Director as well as the Federal Minister of Humanitarian Affairs, Disaster Management, and Social Development, Sadiya Umar Farouq.¹⁶¹ The allegations were later dismissed after an investigation by the National Assembly, but reports of corruption continued to plague the NEDC.¹⁶²

A shift to development may signal a return to normalcy and rebuilding of the lives of many Nigerians who have been affected by the crisis, but a shift to development can mean an influx of new rents that some may attempt to siphon off for their own material reward and political budgets.

Security Rents

Defense spending has been a historic source of political budgets in Nigeria. The perception among many humanitarian actors, as well as some government actors—notably Governor Zulum—is that there are vested interests in maintaining a low-level insurgency to keep the wartime economy—and security rents—flowing.¹⁶³ While the “Armstrong” scandal demonstrated how government procurement lacked transparency, effective controls, or oversight, and could be manipulated to channel money to political supporters, little action has been taken to address these weak internal controls.¹⁶⁴ For example, defense budgets and major purchases are rarely disclosed to the public, and regular procurement procedures requiring competitive bids do not apply to the defense sector. While Buhari’s response to this scandal was initially promising, from 2015 to the present, Buhari has largely tolerated security sector corruption.¹⁶⁵

In addition to corruption in the defense sector, there are also legal channels, called “security votes,” that are believed to have been used to channel billions of Naira (millions of dollars). Security votes are officially budgeted funds given to certain federal, state, and local officials for theoretically anything security-related, but in practice, security votes are used as opaque slush funds.¹⁶⁶ They are unaudited, transacted completely in cash, and on average, total more than \$670 million annually.¹⁶⁷ That is almost 1.5 times the annual budget of the Army. These votes serve a variety of purposes, including their intended security purposes, but they are also seen as a common channel for corruption. For example, in 2014, Bayelsa State reported 12 separate security votes going to a range of different actors including security-related actors such as the Special Advisor for State Security as well as non-security actors such as the Special Advisor for Beautification and Special Security Advisor for Research and Social Media.¹⁶⁸ Since these funds are unaudited and disbursed completely in cash, it is difficult to determine how they were used but it is believed that this is one way that President Jonathan sent rents to his home state. Security votes

dei,” (July 9): <http://saharareporters.com/2020/07/09/we-used-n15bn-take-care-ourselves-covid-19-palliative-says-nddc-md-pondei>.

161 Salem, Tordue. 2020. “Reps probe minister, alleged missing N100bn NEDC funds,” *Vanguard*, (July 23): <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/reps-probe-minister-alleged-missing-n100bn-nedc-funds/>

162 Sahara Reporters. 2021. “North-East Development Commission Managing Director, Alkali in Alleged Multi-Billion Naira Corruption Scandal.” *Sahara Reporters*. 8 July. Accessed 30 March 2022 <http://saharareporters.com/2021/07/08/north-east-development-com-mission-managing-director-alkali-alleged-multi-billion-naira>; for a counter-argument made by known pro-government NGO, Good Governance Advocacy Network, see The Cable. 2021. “Those accusing NEDC boss of corruption ‘lack evidence’,” *The Cable*. 9 July. Accessed 30 March 2022. <https://www.thecable.ng/those-accusing-nedc-boss-of-corruption-lack-evidence>. For a thorough analysis of fake NGOs created to bolster the government, see Page 2021.

163 Munshi 2018.

164 Transparency International, 2019. Government Defence Integrity Index Country Overview: Nigeria, (October): <https://ti-defence.org/gdi/countries/nigeria/>.

165 Center for Democracy and Development. 2020. “Buhari’s Corruption Fight: A Five-Year Assessment,” (May).

166 Page, Matthew T. 2018. “Camouflaged Cash: Security Votes and Corruption” *Transparency International*, (May): 1.

167 Ibid.

168 Page 2018, 14.

were extremely common under Jonathan's administration, and while they decreased during Buhari's first year in office, they later steadily increased.¹⁶⁹

Illicit Sources of Political Budgets: Illicit Trade, Smuggling and Kidnapping Schemes

The instability and lack of government control in the northeast, and northern Nigeria more broadly, have created an ideal environment for non-state groups and security forces to operate illicit moneymaking schemes. Boko Haram is believed to have been engaged in these throughout the insurgency,¹⁷⁰ but allegations have also implicated the military.¹⁷¹ The Nigerian Army has been accused of operating an illicit fishing operation out of Baga, and similar allegations of illicit trade in cattle have emerged in the past.¹⁷² The Army has denied these allegations and stated that it will investigate them, but the Army investigating itself leaves many in doubt of any meaningful action.¹⁷³

Rank-and-file soldiers report being put in an impossible situation. They are charged with fighting Boko Haram but argue that they are under-resourced and receive little pay, allegedly because their commanders are embezzling the money.¹⁷⁴ Rank-and-file soldiers say engaging in illicit activities can be one of the only ways to have a decent living.¹⁷⁵ Illicit schemes have included purchasing critical materials such as vehicles for Boko Haram, as well as operating Boko Haram supply smuggling routes.¹⁷⁶ Against a backdrop of rising food prices and a crumbling economy, illicit trade can be extremely profitable.¹⁷⁷

In addition to illicit trade and smuggling, kidnap for ransom schemes have proven immensely profitable for armed bandits and non-state groups, including Boko Haram.¹⁷⁸ SBM Intelligence, a Nigerian consulting firm, reports that between June 2011 and March 2020, at least \$18.34 million has been paid to kidnappers from victims, and this is only what has been documented.¹⁷⁹ More worrying, almost \$11 million of the reported \$18.34 million was paid from January 2016 to March 2020, indicating that kidnappings were increasing.¹⁸⁰ The most infamous example is the negotiated release of the Chibok Girls in which the Nigerian government is reported to have paid hundreds of millions of euros for their release, a claim which the government disputes (not included in SBM estimates).¹⁸¹ In March 2021, Ahmed Idris, an Abuja-based reporter for Al Jazeera, said that abductions in the north were "becoming the most lucrative criminal enterprise in Nigeria today – and it's growing fast."¹⁸² What is perhaps most alarming is the

169 Page 2018, 8.

170 Samuel, Malik. 2022. "Boko Haram's deadly business: An economy of violence in the Lake Chad Basin," West Africa Report 40. Institute for Security Studies. September. <https://issafrica.s3.amazonaws.com/site/uploads/war-40.pdf>.

171 Ibid.

172 Samuel 2022, 7.

173 Olugbode 2020.

174 Fulani, Iro Dan. 2014. "How corrupt army commanders undermine fight against Boko Haram." *ICIR*. 5 May. <https://www.icirigeria.org/how-corrupt-army-commanders-undermine-fight-against-boko-haram/>.

175 Ibid.

176 Samuel 2022, 7-15.

177 Ibid.

178 Campbell, John. 2021. "Kidnapping and Ransom Payments in Nigeria." Council on Foreign Relations [Blog] 18 February. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/kidnapping-and-ransom-payments-nigeria>.

179 SBM Intel. 2020. "Nigeria's Kidnap Problem: The Economics of the Kidnap Industry in Nigeria," May. https://www.sbmintel.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/202005_Nigeria-Kidnap.pdf.

180 See SBM Intel 2020 appendix for a full listing of documented cases.

181 Parkinson and Hinshaw 2021.

182 Al Jazeera. 2021. "Gunmen raid school in Nigeria's Kaduna, seize three teachers." 15 March. <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/3/15/gunmen-kidnap-primary-school-pupils-in-nigerias-northwest-kaduna>.

increase in reported linkages between armed groups and Boko Haram. Boko Haram is known to have courted the support of other armed groups,¹⁸³ but there are indications that mass kidnappings carried out in from 2020 through 2022 were done by armed bandits on behalf of Boko Haram and ISWAP.¹⁸⁴

Insecurity in northern Nigeria has provided the opportunity for these illicit schemes, but as Samuel argues, the schemes themselves not only generate funds for the groups, but they also perpetuate insecurity and could divert the government's attention from Boko Haram and ISWAP.¹⁸⁵

CONCLUSION:

Insights of the Political Marketplace Analysis

The beginning of 2022 marked the twelfth year of the Boko Haram insurgency, and while progress had been made, there is no clear end in sight. Instead, a status quo of continued crisis and low-level insurgency is caught in a vicious cycle.

One of the many striking elements of the Boko Haram insurgency is that the factors that have caused and perpetuated it—monetized political alliances utilizing violence, widespread grievances of government corruption and abuses, and the lack of government accountability to the Nigerian people—are not factors isolated to the northeast. In a sense, these came together in the perfect storm in the northeast, but they characterize political dynamics in many parts of Nigeria. In 2014, Crisis Group described the northeast crisis writing:

*Ultimately radical reform of governance and the country's political culture is required. This is a big agenda, one Nigeria's elites have not yet demonstrated they have the will to attack. But if they do not, Boko Haram, or groups like it, will continue to destabilize large parts of the country.*¹⁸⁶

Years later, their analysis has held true. From 2020 through 2022, reports emerged of factions of Boko Haram (notably Ansaru and the Islamic State in West Africa), al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, along with banditry groups operating and launching attacks across northern Nigeria and at times even in Abuja.¹⁸⁷ At the same time, the government's counterinsurgency stalled, and millions of Nigerians remain displaced and dependent on humanitarian aid.

While it was clear that humanitarian actors were being co-opted and aligned to security and political agendas against their will, they were providing much-needed aid at a time when the Nigerian government was increasingly unable to do so. Due to the 2020 drop in oil prices combined with the pandemic freeze on economic activities, the Nigerian government faced massive budget shortfalls and an economy

183 Dahiru, Aliyu. 2020. "Militia Groups in North-West Nigeria in Process of Sealing Allegiance with Boko Haram." *HumAngle*, 16 June. <https://humangle.ng/militia-groups-in-north-west-nigeria-in-a-process-of-sealing-allegiance-with-boko-haram/>.

184 Samuel, Malik. 2021. "Boko Haram teams up with bandits in Nigeria." *Institute for Security Studies*. 3 March. <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/boko-haram-teams-up-with-bandits-in-nigeria>; Samuel 2022, 16.

185 Malik 2021.

186 Crisis Group 2014, 49.

187 See UNHCR. 2020a. "Protection Monitoring Dashboard: Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara, Nigeria," (May): <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/77184.pdf>; Ezeamalu, Ben. 2020. "Nigeria: Al-Qaida 'Making Inroads' in North-West Nigeria – U.S. General." *Premium Times*. 6 August. <https://allafrica.com/stories/202008060680.html>.

that contracted by 1.8 percent in 2021.¹⁸⁸ The number of Nigerians living below the poverty line rose by 8 million in 2020 to 90.9 million, almost half of the country.¹⁸⁹ Nigeria remains as one of the countries with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, second to India, despite India having almost six times the population of Nigeria.¹⁹⁰ In March 2022, as many as 14.45 million Nigerians across the country, including 4.1 million in the northeast, were expected to experience crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity (IPC 3-4) in the 2022 lean season (June – August).¹⁹¹

Understanding the interplay between political marketplace and the humanitarian response is fundamental to beginning to understand how to chart a new path forward.

Unfortunately, by no metric is the crisis over. While violence related to Boko Haram may not dominate headlines, a continued low-level insurgency combined with pandemic conditions resulted in levels of food insecurity that paralleled food insecurity levels from the height of the insurgency. Understanding the interplay between political marketplace and the humanitarian response is fundamental to beginning to understand how to chart a new path forward. The humanitarian crisis in the northeast is not a natural phenomenon. It was not the result of crop failure, but a manmade crisis caused and perpetuated by competitive, transactional, rent-based politics. These politics have created and entrenched a crisis economy fueled by security, development, and humanitarian rents. Breaking this status quo will be an uphill battle—but it is one that must be fought. Recognizing how the crisis is intertwined and perpetuated by the political system is key to being able to bring it to an end.

188 World Bank. 2021. *Time for Business Unusual*. Nigeria Development Update. (November). <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099545011232116970/pdf/P1778200813d1605e0b361074dc50d90cd3.pdf>, 1.

189 World Bank 2021, 3.

190 Oluwole, Victor. 2022. “Nigeria is no longer the poverty capital of the world but still has over 70 million people living in extreme poverty – the highest in Africa.” *Business Insider*. 10 March. Accessed 6 October 2022. <https://africa.businessinsider.com/local/markets/nigeria-is-no-longer-the-poverty-capital-of-the-world-but-still-has-over-70-million/2txm7g3>.

191 CILSS 2022.

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Supported by



This research is supported by funding from UK Aid from the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO). The information and views set out in this publication are those of the author. Nothing herein constitutes the views of FCDO.

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