



SPECIAL REPORT

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ABOUT THE REPORT

Boko Haram is an extremist sect in Nigeria that has caused devastating damage in Northern Nigeria and threatens the stability of Nigeria as a whole. The U.S. Institute of Peace commissioned the CLEEN Foundation in Nigeria to research how Boko Haram is able to continue to recruit young men to its membership. CLEEN published a full report on its findings; this Special Report is drawn from its conclusions.

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Why Do Youth Join Boko Haram?

Summary

- Since Nigeria's return to democracy in May 1999, armed nonstate groups have significantly undermined the country's internal security environment, largely using young men as foot soldiers. Among these groups, Boko Haram has grown to become a serious national, regional, and international concern. Estimates of the death toll from Boko Haram attacks since 2009 range as high as ten thousand fatalities. With Boko Haram and other groups seemingly gaining in strength, questions arise as to why young men join them in the first place and what the government and other actors can do to prevent it.
- Surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted in Nigeria in 2013 suggest that poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and weak family structures make or contribute to making young men vulnerable to radicalization. Itinerant preachers capitalize on the situation by preaching an extreme version of religious teachings and conveying a narrative of the government as weak and corrupt. Armed groups such as Boko Haram can then recruit and train youth for activities ranging from errand running to suicide bombings.
- To weaken the armed groups' abilities to radicalize and recruit young men, the Nigerian government at all levels, perhaps with support from interested international actors, could institute monitoring and regulation of religious preaching; strengthen education, job training, and job creation programs; design robust programs to aid destitute children; promote peace education; and embark on an anticorruption campaign. Addressing the conditions that make it possible for insurgents to recruit young men in Nigeria can significantly diminish the strength of the insurgency, if not eliminate it altogether.

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Introduction

Since Nigeria's return to democracy in May 1999, armed nonstate groups, largely using young men as foot soldiers, have significantly undermined the country's internal security environment. With the stability of the country, and possibly the region, at stake, urgent questions arise as to how and why youth become radicalized and join these armed groups in the first

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place—particularly Boko Haram, in northern Nigeria—and what the Nigerian government and other interested actors to do to prevent it.

The violent activities of the Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awati wal Jihad, otherwise known as Boko Haram, have become a serious national, regional, and international concern. The group attracted worldwide attention in July 2009 when it staged a violent anti-government uprising that killed over eight hundred people, including civilians, group members, and security personnel. The revolt attracted one of the heaviest security crackdowns in Nigerian history. The five-day confrontation ended on July 30, when the police captured and executed Boko Haram's charismatic leader, Mohammed Yusuf. In May 2014, the group again drew international attention when it kidnapped over two hundred schoolgirls in an attempt to broker a prisoner exchange.

Since the 2009 uprising, the group's actions have "been driven by a desire for vengeance against politicians, police, and Islamic authorities for their role in a brutal suppression of the group that year. But the group has proved itself to be very adaptable, evolving its tactics swiftly and changing its targets."¹ The group's methods have evolved from poorly planned and open confrontations with state security forces to increasing use of improvised explosive devices, targeted assassinations, ambushes, drive-by shootings, suicide bombings, and kidnappings.² There is no exact figure on casualties from Boko Haram attacks, though President Goodluck Jonathan has stated that the group has "so far claimed over 12,000 lives, with more than 8,000 persons injured or maimed, not to mention the displacement of thousands of innocent Nigerians."³

Against the above background, six researchers from the CLEEN Foundation (formerly known as the Center for Law Enforcement Education) based in Lagos carried out a 2013 mapping study, conducting interviews with at least one hundred informants each in six states to investigate why young Nigerians are inclined to join insurgent groups, particularly Boko Haram.⁴ This report draws extensively from that larger study to examine youth radicalization and insurgent affiliation in Nigeria.⁵

Radicalization

The concept of radicalization has gained significant currency among government officials, media practitioners, scholars, and security officials in discourses on terrorism and violent extremism, especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. Those who use the term do not agree on a single definition, as Schmid has rightly noted,⁶ but a loose consensus has emerged that radicalization, whether at the individual or group level, involves a process of rejecting the status quo and often democratic ideals; adopting an extreme political, social, or religious ideology; and condoning violence as a means to achieving ideological goals.⁷

Experts believe that radicalization is the result of a complex overlap of concurring and mutually reinforcing factors,⁸ unique to each context and, to a certain extent, each individual. The process of radicalization begins with changes in self-identification due to grievances, frequently driven by personal or group concerns regarding local issues as well as international events. A grievance is understood to create the sense of alienation or disenchantment that provides a cognitive opening for radicalization. A radical ideology—an extreme set of ideas—then provides the individual with a new outlook and explanation for the world in which he finds himself. An individual becomes mobilized as he slowly integrates into a community of other like-minded people. Finally, a tipping point—usually a specific event—can push an individual or group from rhetoric to action.⁹

This report defines radicalization as the process by which an individual or group transitions from passive reception of revolutionary, militant, or extremist views, ideas, and beliefs

to active pursuit of these ideals, especially through supporting, promoting, or adopting violence to realize such intentions. This transition underlies violent extremism or terrorism. Understood in this way, the crucial challenge is to uncover why young people are inclined to join insurgent groups in northern Nigeria—particularly Boko Haram.

Understanding Boko Haram

It is not clear when Boko Haram came into being. A common account of the group's origin traces it to 2002, when Mohammed Yusuf, a charismatic preacher, became its leader. To Nigeria's intelligence community, however, its true historical roots hark back to 1995, when Abubakar Lawan established the Ahlusunna wal'jama'ah hijra, or Shabaab group (Muslim Youth Organization), in Maiduguri, Borno state.¹⁰ The group flourished as a nonviolent movement until 2002, when Yusuf assumed leadership. It has appeared over time under various names, such as the Muhajirun, Hijrah, Ahlis Sunnah wal Jama'a, Yusufiyah, and Nigerian Taliban.

Boko Haram's ideology is premised on an extreme Islamic teaching that rejects most Western ideas and institutions as un-Islamic. This rejection earned the group its popular name: Boko Haram literally means "Western education is forbidden." However, the group prefers to be called by its real name, Jama'atu Ahlissunnah Lidda'awati wal Jihad, meaning "people committed to the propagation of the Prophet's teachings and jihad." Its core objective is to replace the secular Nigerian state with a regime adhering to strict Islamic sharia law, applicable throughout the entire country.

Boko Haram draws its members mainly from disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children, mostly from but not limited to northern Nigeria. Its membership also includes some wealthy, educated, and influential people. The group is known to sustain its operations through diverse sources of funding, including membership dues, donations from politicians, financial assistance from foreign terrorist groups, raiding of banks, and ransom from kidnapping. It also has extorted money from residents of areas it has controlled, as well as from wealthy persons whom they have intimidated into paying protection fees to avoid being attacked by them.

Its history of violence dates to December 24, 2003, when it attacked police stations and public buildings in the towns of Geiam and Kanamma in Yobe state. Members occupied two buildings for several days, hoisting the flag of Afghanistan's Taliban movement over the camps. Soldiers and police removed them only after killing eighteen of them and arresting dozens more.¹¹ The sect had earlier established a base they called Afghanistan in Kanamma village in northern Yobe state. In Maiduguri, Mohammed Yusuf was already drawing youth to him through his preaching about the excesses of government officials, culminating in his frequent declaration of secular education as *haram* (forbidden) to Muslims.¹² His preaching attracted youth from Yobe and Borno states, as well as neighbouring countries—Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

The activities of the group became even more worrisome in 2004 when students, especially in tertiary institutions in Borno and Yobe states, withdrew from school, tore up their certificates, and joined the group. On September 21, 2004, members attacked the Bama and Gworza police stations in Borno state, killing several policemen and stealing arms and ammunition. The group continued with intermittent hit-and-run attacks on security posts in some parts of Borno and Yobe until the July 2009 antigovernment uprising in Nigeria.

The remote cause of the July 2009 revolt is often traced to the fatal shootings of sect members on June 11, 2009, by security forces involved in Operation Flush,¹³ following a clash with sect members for not wearing crash helmet while on their motorbikes for a funeral procession. In retaliation, the members attacked and destroyed the Dutsen Tanshi

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police station on July 26. This raised the curtain for a wave of unrest that swept through Bauchi, Borno, Kano, Katsina, and Yobe states. The revolt ended on July 30, 2009, when Mohammed Yusuf was finally captured in his residence in Maiduguri. After a few hours in police custody, the police killed Yusuf extrajudicially; police officials claimed that he was trying to escape. Over eight hundred people, mainly sect members, were killed during the revolt, and hundreds more were arrested. Nigerian authorities' methods in repressing the 2009 revolt proved to be crucial in the deadly escalation of Boko Haram's violent attacks. The group went underground and later adopted Yusuf's hard-line top deputy, Abubakar Shekau, as the sect's new spiritual leader. It subsequently developed new violent tactics: bombings, targeted assassinations, ambushes, drive-by shootings, and slitting victims' throats.

Since the July 2009 revolt, the sect has evolved into a more dynamic and decentralized organization, capable of changing and combining tactics as well as expanding or reordering target selection. Boko Haram has attacked a variety of groups, including security agents, Christians, traditional rulers, politicians, schoolchildren and teachers, Islamic scholars, public servants, traders, and, lately, anyone who is not a member. Most of the attacks have occurred in Maiduguri, the capital city of Borno state. The group also has claimed responsibility for several attacks in Adamawa, Bauchi, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Kogi, Niger, Plateau, and Yobe states, as well as the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The group leapt onto the world's agenda in August 2011 when it bombed the UN compound in Abuja, killing twenty-three people.¹⁴ In January 2012, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in fifteen local governments across four states in the north. By July 2012, when the state of emergency ceased, the security crisis had not been addressed. In May 2013, President Jonathan again declared a state of emergency in the three most affected states of Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe.

Reports show that the foot soldiers of the sect consist predominantly of young people who are ready to fight and die for the new cause they have been made to believe in. Based on the analysis of 144 arrested Boko Haram members, a recent study has shown that the median age of the group's members is thirty years.¹⁵ Its young followers, who previously used local weapons in attacks, have become highly radicalized individuals willing to carry out suicide bombings in pursuit of martyrdom—a phenomenon that never occurred in Nigeria until the June 16, 2011, suicide attack on Abuja's police headquarters by a thirty-five-year-old Boko Haram member, Mohammad Manga. This development makes the question of why young people are willing to join an insurgent group like Boko Haram that much more urgent.

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Why Young People Join Boko Haram

In 2013, the U.S. Institute of Peace commissioned a study from the CLEEN Foundation in Nigeria to examine the factors contributing to youth radicalization and recruitment into armed groups. In addition to reviewing media reports, databases, policy reports, newspapers, and academic literature, the foundation conducted primary research involving surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions. Consultants and experts ran field studies in two towns in each of the six states in northern Nigeria selected for the study: Borno (Maiduguri and Biu), Gombe (Gombe Town and Akko), Kaduna (Zaria and Kaduna), Kano (Nassarawa and Tarauni), Sokoto (Sokoto Town and Shagari Town), and Yobe (Damaturu and Potiskum). The field research, carried out between June and November 2013, included interviews with traditional leaders, religious leaders of all religious groups, security officials, women leaders, and political leaders, as well as focus group discussions with youth, women, and faith groups. Semi-structured questionnaires were administered to teachers, community leaders, religious leaders, youth, civil

society organizations, security agents (e.g., officials in the police, state security, immigration, defense, prisons, customs, and army, as well as vigilante groups), and women groups.

In the volatile area of northern Nigeria, especially Borno and Yobe, researchers encountered some challenges that may impinge on data quality. First, many respondents were uncomfortable with the interviews, especially Christians and security agents, who in a few cases turned down researchers' requests out of an understandable fear of victimization. Second, researchers structured the questionnaire to mention Boko Haram sparingly. Third, the sample sizes for the questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups varied significantly, owing to the unique challenges and limitations researchers faced in their respective states. A stakeholder validation workshop was held on December 19, 2013, and the comments, observations, and suggestions made during the validation workshop were also used to enrich this report.

Despite the study's limitations and challenges, however, the results suggest a range of forces driving youth toward radicalization and extremism. Some of the variation likely arises because mobilization can be very specific to context. Personal engagement in Boko Haram also varies widely among its membership. Some are foot soldiers or bomb makers. Others are strategists, ideologues, or criminals. The reasons a young boy agrees to spy on police may be completely different than the reasons other members abduct two hundred schoolgirls. The boy who carries out a suicide bombing at a police station certainly has different motivations than the one who makes a little money helping the organization out. However, the study also revealed main causative factors, which are economic, social, political, and religious in nature and cut across all six states included in the research.

Ignorance of religious teaching opposed to violence makes youth more vulnerable and susceptible to recruitment. In all the states surveyed, there is unanimity that initial ignorance of religious teaching is the leading factor influencing the adoption of extreme religious views, especially among youth. The lack of deep knowledge of true religious teaching is partly related to three observable dangerous trends in the recent practice of religion in Nigeria: the proliferation of sects in both Islam and Christianity, the proliferation of independent preachers in both religions, and the increasing reliance on preachers rather than on the holy books themselves. As a result, young people are very vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization by independent and roaming preachers, extremist groups, and religious ideologues, who often distort religious injunctions.

In Borno state, 93.2 percent of respondents were of the view that ignorance of the full teaching of their religion influenced young people's adoption of extreme religious views. In Kano and Sokoto, 90 percent and 82 percent of respondents, respectively, believed that ignorance of the full teaching of their religions is a factor that influences the adoption of extreme religious views by young people in the community. Kashim Shettima, the governor of Borno state, also gave credence to this observation when he lamented recently that "distorted translation of the Holy Book by the insurgents landed us in this mess. If we had good understanding of Islam, we would have been in a better place. There is no room for extremism in Islam. We need to go back to Islam as practised by Prophet Muhammad, when Islam encouraged Muslims, Jews, and Christians to live in peace with one another."¹⁶ In some cases, roaming preachers claiming to be Islamic scholars deceive impressionable youths. In others, youth are radicalized in the training camps of terrorist groups through distorted interpretation of the Holy Book.

Unemployment and poverty make youth vulnerable to radicalization. Unemployment and poverty are socioeconomic challenges that are not only intricately interconnected but glaringly evident in northern Nigeria. Figures from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) show that the country's unemployment rate in 2006 averaged 14.60

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percent until 2011, when it reached an all-time high of 23.90 percent. NBS figures released in early 2013 revealed that, despite favorable economic growth and performance, Nigeria's poverty rate jumped from 54.7 percent in 2004 to 60.9 percent in 2010. In 2011, 100 million Nigerians lived in absolute poverty and 12.6 million more were moderately poor. The worst hit by these afflictions are young people, especially in northern Nigeria.¹⁷

In Borno and Kaduna states, survey respondents identified the high incidence of unemployment and poverty that prevail in the state as the second most important reason why youth engage in religious-based violence. In Kaduna state, 83 percent of respondents reported that unemployment and poverty are important factors. In Kano, 92 percent cited them as important. This is not to argue that unemployment and poverty are direct causes of youth radicalization; rather, privation and other frustrating conditions of life render youth highly vulnerable to manipulation by extremist ideologues. As Komolafe has argued, even if unemployment and poverty are not the main factors in radicalization in Nigeria, "the tendency to produce suicide bombers is greater in a community defined by mass misery and joblessness than the one in which basic needs of food, education, health, housing, and sanitation are met for the majority of the people."¹⁸

Children with difficult upbringings are more vulnerable to extremist views. The growing number of children without adequate parental guidance is a societal condition that has contributed to the problem of youth radicalization in Northern Nigeria. Children who lack a protective social environment are more likely to be exploited. Across the states in Nigeria, especially in the north, millions of school-age children are not enrolled in school, exacerbating illiteracy levels in the country and vulnerability to manipulation by extremist groups. Widespread poverty in northern Nigeria has contributed to a growing population of destitute children. In states such as Borno and Yobe, which have witnessed the worst cases of violence, as well as in states such as Gombe and Sokoto, which are relatively peaceful, respondents to questionnaires and participants in focus group discussions strongly agree that children from poor homes or those who were not brought up by their biological parents—including children from broken homes, abandoned and orphaned children, and children who are in the custody of relatives or others—are the most vulnerable to being used to perpetrate religious violence. In Kano state, 80 percent cited this as an important factor. It is not surprising that terrorist groups such as the Boko Haram are tapping into this situation to achieve their violent objectives.¹⁹

In June 2013, young suspects who were released by the military claimed Boko Haram paid them 5,000 naira each (about \$30 U.S. dollars) to set schools in Yobe and Borno states on fire and spy on soldiers. According to one of them, "We watched out for the soldiers at their units and reported back to them. We were reporting when soldiers were at ease or enjoying themselves and when they were off guard and we were paid for doing that."²⁰ The children, who ranged from nine to fifteen years in age, have also helped Boko Haram traffic weapons, carry stolen items, and hide their guns after attacks. The children's alienation from home and society provides the cognitive opening that extremist ideologues exploit in the process of recruitment and radicalization.

High levels of illiteracy linked to youth radicalization and extremism. Across the six states, study participants identified high levels of illiteracy as one of the major factors influencing young people's adoption of extreme religious views. In Gombe state, illiteracy was ranked second out of the sixteen factors listed. It was also ranked second in Yobe state. It was slightly lower in Borno state, where it was ranked fourth out of the sixteen factors listed as causes of youth extremism and violence. In Kano, 75 percent cited it as important. Illiterate people can be more easily manipulated because their state of social deprivation denies them the capacity and knowledge to critically question the narratives and doctrines

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of extremist groups. While it is evident that illiterates do not manufacture the bombs that Boko Haram uses, arrest records suggest that the “real armies of suicide bombers and terrorists’ foot soldiers” are drawn from such “disadvantaged, stranded populations,” suggesting how poverty, lack of education, and indoctrination contribute to terrorism.²¹ Poverty, illiteracy, and radicalization are interwoven; in the six states examined, they are correlated. The poor are unlikely to send their children to school and likely to be illiterate, unemployed, and thus vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization.

Responses regarding excesses of the security forces were mixed. The Nigerian security and military forces deployed against Boko Haram have been criticized by an enraged local population, social commentators, opinion leaders, civil society organizations, and media for their harsh tactics, which have injured civilians and damaged property. Allegations include unlawful killings, dragnet arrests, extortion, and intimidation. A section of the media, especially international media, has repeatedly mentioned that the excesses of the security forces are a crucial factor in youth radicalization. Findings from this study show, however, that alleged excesses of security forces are among the least important driving forces of youth extremism and violence. In Yobe state, the action of the security agents toward the public was ranked fifteenth out of sixteen factors in youth radicalization. Security action toward members of extremist religious groups, such as Boko Haram, was ranked last.

That the actions of security forces ranked last should not be construed as these factors having no effect in youth radicalization. In Kano state, 27 percent said it was a very important factor, and 50 percent of respondents in Kaduna state believed that security forces’ actions are important or very important. Notwithstanding, the appropriate authorities need urgently to address allegations of human rights violations by security forces to improve public confidence in and support for the security forces deployed in counterterrorism operations.

Widespread corruption conducive to recruitment and radicalization. The Nigerian government’s high rate of corruption and neglect of citizen welfare also feeds the extremist narrative. In Sokoto state, 70 percent of participants cited this as an important factor, while in Kano state, 67 percent cited it as important. Widespread corruption in Nigeria has not only deprived communities of needed amenities and infrastructure but has created an environment conducive for recruitment and radicalization. Pervasive malfeasance, especially in the public sector, provides a key referent around which extremists can frame antiseccular ideology and radicalization. Mohammed Yusuf’s sermons and recorded tapes, as well as Abubakar Shekau’s tapes in which he claims responsibility for attacks, refer to the corrupt attitudes of *yan boko*—modern elites trained at secular schools—who have acquired Western education and are currently in positions of power. Their ideological refrain is that “the system represented by the *yan boko* is unjust, secular, and has no divine origin. It is therefore un-Islamic, which in turn accounts for its ineptitude and corruptness.”²² In its drive to recruit members, Boko Haram presents a narrative about corruption that easily appeals to impoverished, alienated, and jobless northern Muslim youth.

Widespread corruption in Nigeria has not only deprived communities of needed amenities and infrastructure but has created an environment conducive for recruitment and radicalization. Pervasive malfeasance provides a key referent around which extremists can frame antiseccular ideology and radicalization.

Policy Recommendations

As the factors contributing to youth radicalization and violent extremism are numerous and diverse, the following are measures suggested to effectively curb them in northern Nigeria.

Monitor and regulate religious preaching. Given that independent, roaming preachers are key purveyors of distorted religious teachings, there is a need to regulate and monitor it in Nigeria. During Ramadan in 2013, Gombe’s state government brought out guidelines—agreed upon by Muslim and Christian leaders—regulating all preaching and teaching at that time to avoid the use of strong language against another religion or sect. Taking a cue from

this experience, Nigeria's government could create a Religious Affairs Regulatory and Monitoring Commission (RARMC), including representatives of the major religions, state security service, credible civil society organizations with track records on promoting public safety, and the media. The RARMC could be established through a robust national consultation involving relevant stakeholders to agree on its mandate, power, composition, and functions. The commission would be responsible for monitoring and regulating the mode and content of preaching to prevent religious ideologues from misleading young people with false or distorted preaching.

Create job opportunities for Nigerian youth. The Nigerian government must embark on effective poverty alleviation and human capital development programs for youth who are most vulnerable to recruitment and radicalization. At local, state, and federal levels, the government should establish demonstration farms or workshops to give youth vocational skills or knowledge that allow them to be self-employed in gainful enterprises. The government also should establish business development service centers in each of Nigeria's 776 local government areas, adequately funded and staffed with skilled personnel to offer business development and career advice to jobless youth, facilitate young entrepreneurs' access to credit or start-up funds, provide coaching services, and distribute market information data to inform youths' decisions about career paths. A special youth empowerment fund or financial facility needs to be created; such a facility should be robustly structured to enhance transparency and accountability in its management to avoid unnecessary bottlenecks and patronage considerations that prevent youth who genuinely need such interventions from accessing them.

Design and deliver a robust program for destitute children. The Nigerian government should appropriately fund the National Council for the Welfare of the Destitute (NCWD) to enable the agency to formulate and implement robust rehabilitation programs for destitute children in Nigeria. Government at all levels, especially working through the NCWD, should partner with credible civil society organizations to design and implement effective reorientation programs for destitute children to provide them with the support and training they need to function effectively in society. Philanthropic individuals, civil society groups, religious bodies, and government can put to use the skills of university graduates who studied social work and social psychology. Such rehabilitation and reintegration interventions could be expedient, given the finding that children who were not brought up by their parents are more disposed to use violence in propagating their religious views; given their socioeconomic situations, such children are extremely vulnerable to religious extremism and financial influences.

Enhance provision of education and literacy programs. High levels of illiteracy in Nigeria contribute to young people becoming more easily susceptible to manipulation and recruitment into extremist groups. Although the right to education is one of the basic rights of every Nigerian, access to this right is hardly attained. The issue of free and compulsory primary and secondary education in Nigeria should transcend mere statement to practical delivery of this basic entitlement to Nigeria's children. The recent federal government program aimed at remodelling the (Quranic) Almajiri educational system is a step in the right direction but needs further overhauling of the curriculum. To reinforce the recommendations above, it must inculcate the training, skills, and scientific knowledge to make children competitive in the modern economy. Local and state governments need to deliver quality and accessible education to more children in northern Nigeria through enhanced allocation to, and judicious use of funds in, the educational sector.

Promote peace education. The Nigerian government, religious institutions, the private sector, and civil society groups should invest more resources in promoting peace education,

Government at all levels should partner with credible civil society organizations to design and implement effective reorientation programs for destitute children to provide them with the support and training they need to function effectively in society.

including reorientation programs that inculcate the value of peaceful coexistence. Peace education will help youth better appreciate the value of peace, making it more difficult for extremists to use them to foment trouble. Peace education should be integrated in the educational curriculum of schools, from primary to tertiary education. Youth radicalization and insidious ideologies that underpin violent extremism also can be curbed through enlightenment programs delivered through radio, television, jingles, and group discussions. The Nigerian government, civil society groups, and the private sector could partner with Nigeria's film industry to produce movies and support radio and television programs in the three major languages (Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) designed to specifically counter narratives and messages promoting youth radicalization.

Improve anticorruption campaign. Growing animosity toward the government and particularly corruption, especially among young people, makes youth more vulnerable to recruitment. The Nigerian government needs to urgently reinvigorate the fight against corruption by repositioning institutions such as the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission. This could help neutralize and deconstruct Boko Haram's violent ideology by denying its ideologues a rallying point for radicalizing frustrated individuals. Money recovered from corrupt officials also would add to funds available for rehabilitating willing Boko Haram adherents, as well as providing basic amenities and infrastructure sorely need in northern Nigeria. Convicting corrupt officials will also have deterrent effects.

Conclusion

Boko Haram's activities in the past five years demonstrate the urgent need to address youth radicalization and religious extremism in northern Nigeria, as they have resulted in the destruction of private and public property, grievous bodily injury and death, and the displacement of thousands of people. Ignorance of true religious teachings is the most important condition for youth to acquire radical views of religion, often propagated by roaming, independent preachers. Poverty and unemployment, poor parental upbringing, and neglect of children also underpin young people's vulnerability to falling prey to violent extremism. Boko Haram has leveraged this vulnerability to deepen their process of recruitment and radicalization, especially in northern Nigeria. Thus, any attempt to effectively weaken the insurgency in northern Nigeria must consider these factors. Addressing the conditions that make it possible for insurgents to recruit from the pool of young men in Nigeria can significantly diminish the strength of the insurgency, if not eliminate it altogether.

Peace education will help youth better appreciate the value of peace, making it more difficult for extremists to use them to foment trouble. Peace education should be integrated in the educational curriculum of schools.

Notes

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