

Anna KOTASIŃSKA

University of Wrocław, Faculty of Social Sciences, Wrocław, Poland

## Nigeria: A Few Words about Political Corruption, the Presence of Boko Haram, and the Growing Power of Fulani Extremists

**Nigeria – kilka słów o korupcji politycznej, obecności Boko Haram i rosnącej sile ekstremistów Fulani**

### • Abstrakt •

Nigeria to państwo kojarzone z zasobami ropy naftowej, wszechobecną korupcją oraz działalnością terrorystyczną ugrupowania Boko Haram. Wszystko to oznacza, że pomimo posiadania niezbędnych zasobów i teoretycznej zdolności rozwoju gospodarczego bycie jednym z najbardziej zamożnych państw Afryki nie prowadzi do jego rozkwitu. Co więcej 2018 rok pokazał, że na sile zyskuje kolejny z problemów, jakim jest działalność ekstremistów Fulani, za sprawą których w Nigerii stale rośnie liczba zgonów spowodowanych ich atakami. Czy skorumpowane władze nigeryjskie będą w stanie skutecznie przeciwdziałać nowej fali terroru w państwie?

**Słowa kluczowe:** Nigeria; korupcja polityczna; terroryzm, Boko Haram; ekstremiści Fulani

### • Abstract •

Nigeria is a country associated with oil wealth, ubiquitous corruption and Boko Haram's terrorist activities. All this means that despite having the necessary resources and the theoretical capacity for economic development, being one of the wealthiest countries in Africa does not lead to its flourishing. What is more, 2018 showed that another problem is gaining strength, namely the functioning of the Fulani extremists, through whom the number of deaths from attacks in Nigeria is steadily increasing. Will the corrupt Nigerian authorities be able to counter the new wave of terror in the country effectively?

**Keywords:** Nigeria; political corruption; terrorism; Boko Haram; Fulani extremists

## Introduction

Nigeria is a state full of paradoxes. It is a place where economic wealth is intertwined with extreme poverty in the society, where the institutions responsible for caring for the welfare and security of the country are accused of partial sponsoring of terrorism and acts of terrorism, and where oil wealth is the curse of those at the bottom of the social pyramid who must survive a day on less than USD 2. That is primarily due to the historically, politically, socially and economically established corruption known as endemic (Makinwa, 2013, p. 271), i.e., limited to a specific area (such as a state, an administrative unit or the area of residence of a narrow social group), in which socio-cultural factors that imply such a state of affairs exist. These can be local institutions, culture, as well as local networks of dependencies (Brol, 2015, p. 19). The greatest problem seems to be political corruption, which is responsible for most of the misfortunes in the country, such as falsification of elections, lack of implementation of announced reforms or low effectiveness of executed projects, destruction of infrastructure, nepotism, internal instability, hindering the flow of foreign investments (Ijewereme, 2015, p. 1), looting state resources or allowing criminal activity, as manifested in the activity of Boko Haram fighters and Fulani extremists.

In 2018, the inter-ethnic conflict in Nigeria escalated, in the result of which many farmers died, and their homes were burnt. It is worth considering why there has been an increase in crime among Fulani extremists and whether their activities can be linked to Boko Haram, as their organization and equipment is emphasized. The article is supposed to be an attempt to answer the research question: What impact does political corruption have on the functioning of terrorists and extremists in the country? That will make it possible to determine to what extent political corruption is still a factor strongly destabilizing the internal situation in Nigeria, which is facing not only an increase in crime but also an economic recession and extreme poverty. The question is to be answered with the use of qualitative research methods – the source analysis, content analysis, and comparative method.

## Nigeria – why is it so bad if it should be so good?

Nigeria is a country that has been struggling with many problems for many years. These include religious conflicts, poverty, bad governance, and, above all, corruption. This is directly related to the financing of the terrorist activities of Boko Haram, which is an Islamic separatist organization seeking to create an Af-

rican caliphate like the Islamic State of Iraq and Levant – ISIL (Stempień, 2016, pp. 126–128). The current internal situation in Nigeria is well illustrated by numerous indicators based on statistical data. One of them is GDP<sup>1</sup>, which in 2017 ranked the country second among all African countries with the amount of USD 1,121 trillion (the first place – Egypt – USD 1,204 trillion). Nevertheless, the external debt increased in 2017 to USD 40.96 billion (compared to USD 31.41 billion a year earlier), and the public debt accounted for 21.8% of GDP in 2017, while it was 19.6% of GDP in 2016 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). So, where is the money that should improve Nigeria's economic situation?

It is estimated that every year in developing countries, USD 20–40 billion is robbed due to corruption, and the funds siphoned in this way are invested abroad. In the case of Nigeria, this could be the equivalent of the external debt. Only a small percentage can be recovered and returned to the state, but without the certainty that it will not be illegally disbursed again. An example is the funds raised in Switzerland from the late General Sani Abacha, who was supposed to plunder public funds of USD 3–5 billion. In 2006, USD 723 million was recovered, and now another USD 322 million of the money pillaged by the Abacha family is planned to be returned to Nigeria from Switzerland. The problem is that “currently, Nigeria has no framework for monitoring, managing and utilizing recovered assets and other proceeds of crime. [...] This has made it impossible to ascertain the amounts of recovered assets and proceeds of crime”, as emphasizes Vaclav Prusa, an anti-corruption expert at CISLAC (the Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre) in Nigeria (Transparency International, 2018a).

The Niger Delta is seen through the prism of raw material power. In the case of Nigeria, the production of crude oil is the primary source of state revenue. According to the available data, its exports account for 91% of all goods shipped to other countries, and the main recipients include India, China, Spain, the Netherlands, and Italy (Trading Economics, 2019). In 2017 alone, the value of exported goods amounted to USD 44.5 billion, which means a growth of 35.2% compared to the previous year, while estimates for 2018 (determined based on the first three months of 2018) indicated the amount of USD 52.1 billion (Workman, 2019). Wojciech Jagielski, a Polish journalist and war reporter, points out that “Nigeria is the African Kuwait” (Jagielski, 2015). Unfortunately, this is an example of a country in which for many years corrupt political elites have been focusing on acquiring “petrodollars” instead of striving for economic development. In a sense, a lack

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<sup>1</sup> “GDP (purchasing power parity) compares the gross domestic product (GDP) or value of all final goods and services produced within a nation in a given year” (CIA, 2017).

of the latter can be explained by the presence of a resource curse phenomenon. Its definition is contained in the hypothesis that “[...] countries whose economies are based on the exploitation of natural resources develop more slowly than countries without such resources” (Polus, Czernichowski, & Kopiński, 2012, p. 16). However, the “political curse” (corruption) is a much more pressing issue in Nigeria since the successive authorities do not want or are unable to eradicate it. Worse still, it is also linked to the financing of the terrorist organization Boko Haram.

Boko Haram is an organization recognized by some researchers as a Salafist sect, while others associate it with a terrorist structure. The name is translated as “Western education is forbidden” and is meant to oppose the civilization and culture of the West, which came to Nigeria through British colonizers. The beginnings of this organization can be traced back to 1995 but it was only in 2002 that its structure became more formal, which was also accompanied by the crystallization of ideology. This, in turn, included religious, cultural, political and economic issues, and was to lead to the creation of a caliphate with universally binding Sharia law. Due to their willingness to eradicate all elements of Anglo-Saxon culture, they proclaim the necessity of covering the whole state in forced Islamization. Interestingly, Boko Haram also aims to eliminate corruption, which is so prevalent in the country, even though they raise funds for their own functioning, which also stems from political corruption (Popławski, 2015, pp. 1–2).

It is emphasized that Boko Haram – as a structure recognized by the European Union and the United Nations as a terrorist organization<sup>2</sup> – is linked to al-Qaeda and obtains some of the funds for its functioning from this source. Other researchers point out that funds also flow from politicians (Eme & Ugwu, 2016, p. 42). According to Cardinal Anthony Olubunmi Okogie, “Various politicians, particularly at the local level, support terrorism, seeing in it a strategy that helps to increase power” (Radio Vaticana, 2012). However, corruption in Nigeria is also deeply rooted at the state level, where politicians put their interests and profits first. An example is an agreement between the founder of Boko Haram, Mohammed Yusuf, and the Nigerian politician and businessman, Ali Modu Sheriff (Eme & Ugwu, 2016, p. 48). It has also been shown that Yusuf obtained funding from Alhaji Buji Foi, a businessman appointed as Commissioner of Religions Affairs in Borno State. Until 2009, Boko Haram received support from northeast political elites and political businesspeople (Mahmoud, 2018, p. 92). Politicians

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<sup>2</sup> Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) No 583/2014 of 28 May 2014 amending for the 214<sup>th</sup> time Council Regulation (EC) No 881/2002 imposing certain specific restrictive measures directed against certain persons and entities associated with the Al Qaida network.

played a lesser role in its development between 2009 and 2013 when most of the funds for its activity came from criminal actions – bank robberies, extortion, theft, kidnappings for ransom, etc. (Mahmoud, 2018, p. 99). After 2013, weapons were acquired primarily from Nigerian security forces (Mahmoud, 2018, p. 110). “Frequently, corruption is seen as cancer – a malicious but amorphous force that undermines development and security” (MacLachlan, 2018). That is also the case in Nigeria, where its existence destroys the defense capabilities of the state and prevents economic growth.

### **For what (and for whom) do Fulani extremists fight?**

Terrorism in Nigeria is often associated only with the Boko Haram’s operation. However, according to the data, over the years the activity of Boko Haram warriors increasingly rarely leads to the death of civilians. The fact remains that there is another group responsible for the increase in violence in Nigeria in 2018. These include Fulani extremists<sup>3</sup>, at whose hands more people died between 2015 and 2017 than in the effect of Boko Haram’s actions (Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, 2018). Although it could be said that the above is unrelated to terrorist activity and political corruption in Nigeria, it should be remembered that the problem of the crimes committed by Fulani is getting worse, and most Nigerian politicians are representatives of this Islamic ethnic group, “from Ahmadu Bello, Aminu Kano, Shagari, Abubakar Rimi, Yar’ Aduas, Atiku, Buhari, El-Rufai, etc., not to mention the powerful and most determinant traditional institution” (Ebiseni, 2018). Although, as the data from the Central Intelligence Agency show, the largest ethnic group is Hausa (27.4%), and Fulani constitute only 6.3% (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). According to a Fulani PhD holder in Law, “Hausas no longer existed, in its anthropological origin, as a tribe, but completely assimilated by the Fulani” and “the Hausa merely exist while the Fulani called the shots in the name of Hausa/Fulani” (Ebiseni, 2018). If the above is true, then Fulani should be the dominant group in Nigerian society, accounting for one-third of the entire Nigerian population.

International organizations (such as Amnesty International) reduce the problem of Fulani to the escalation of the conflict between farmers and herdsmen

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<sup>3</sup> “Members of the Fula ethnic group found mainly in the northern parts of Nigeria but also dispersed across the country. Most of the Fula people in Nigeria are nomadic pastoralists but many are also sedentary or semisedentary farmers” (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 4).

(Humanitarian Aid Relief Trust, 2019, p. 3). In fact, it is much more complex and concerns mainly extremists who commit high-profile attacks, especially in 2018. In the list of 20 most fatal terrorist attacks in 2017, the 17<sup>th</sup> place was taken by the attack made by Fulani extremists on March 20, 2017, in Zaki Biam, Benue State. The opening of fire by the attackers at the market caused the death of 73 people, while the number of injured is unknown. Although Boko Haram remained the most dangerous group in Nigeria in 2017 due to the number of attacks and the number of casualties, preliminary data from 2018 indicated an increase in the criminal activity of Fulani extremists (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018, p. 21). It is estimated that between January and September 2018 alone, the number of deaths attributed to them was as high as 1700 (89% were civilians), while in 2017 there were 1532 all deaths from terrorist activities in Nigeria (Boko Haram's attacks caused nearly two-thirds of them). It was predicted that in 2018 the number of deaths attributed to Fulani extremists would be six times higher than those committed by Boko Haram (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018, p. 56). According to Amnesty International, Fulani extremists killed 2082 people between January and October 2018. When put the above in parallel with the data from the Institute for Economics & Peace, the growth in the number of deaths of 382 in one month is seen. For comparison, there were 814 deaths in 2016 and 745 in 2017. According to estimates, this results in a more than sixfold increase in the number of deaths in 2018 compared to the previous year (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 37).

Fulani extremists are mainly equipped with AK-47s and additionally with G3s, locally made guns, rocket launchers, and machetes (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 35). They attack in various places, most often invading villages (Olokori, 2018), but also entering schools (Persecution, 2019), churches (Shellnutt & World Watch Monitor, 2018), or going to large groups of people such as in market squares (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018, p. 11). They usually carry out their acts of terror through motorcycle invasion and attacking civilians using machine guns. The very methods of attack, organizing and equipping them with military-grade rifles show the degree of specialization of this group and preparation for the activities, which are planned and well thought out. In addition to their attacks on civilians, Fulani extremists also destroy their homes by arson, thus forcing the farmers to resettle. Amnesty International estimated that in 2018, 5000 houses could have been set on fire and 182530 people could have moved their homes (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 16).

Some people claim that the Fulani's struggle is being fought for religious reasons – Christians from the South and Muslims from the North (Blomfield, 2018);

others point to a dispute between cattle herders and farmers over land. The most important thing, however, is that after many years of peaceful existence there was an outbreak of violence, which has become a political problem on a national scale. It escalates at an alarming rate, and therefore strong movements by the Nigerian authorities are needed in order to overcome this crisis and prevent a situation such as the bloody murder in Rwanda at the end of the last century.

The beginning of 2019 brought more clashes and more deaths for Fulani extremists (PAP, 2019). Their uniforms and armament make it possible to state that these are not single shepherds who gathered and decided to steal several bovine animals, but an organized and paid-for formation. Who, then, owns the cattle? Who is the Fulani elite? They include governors, senators, members of the House of Representatives, their predecessors in office, and the president. Moreover, businesspeople, and military and ex-military officers from the North belong to this group as well. Nonetheless, not all of them are Fulani, and not all of them are Northerners, as exemplified by Senator David Mark from Idoma, Benue State (Akinaso, 2018). All cattle owners are connected by hiring Fulani shepherds to work on their farms. This theory is confirmed by the fact that the Nigerian authorities are not accusing Fulani extremists of their crimes, but instead trying to justify them. Despite this, the owners of large cattle farms in Nigeria remain in hiding, under protection.

Representatives of the military also accuse the State governors of financing the murders carried out by Fulani. According to Brigadier General John Agim, Acting Director of Defence Information, politicians and state governors provide arms for those who later, under the guise of fighting between Christian farmers and Muslim herders, invade villages, kill civilians, and steal cattle. What is more, some of the attackers do not come from Nigeria but are brought from other countries to carry out the tasks entrusted to them, for which they receive remuneration. The armed forces demonstrated that in Taraba, Benue, Zamfara, and Nasarawa in Operation Whirl Stroke, which aims at combating violence in the Middle Belt<sup>4</sup> (Aluko, 2018). President Muhammadu Buhari stresses that opposition politicians are partly responsible for the ongoing herders and farmers conflict, and the federal government has evidence of their sponsorship. The rest of the disgraceful merit is attributed to Muammar al-Gaddafi, whose trained and armed fighters were to get into Nigeria and terrorize the local population. That does not alter the fact that each side of the political scene is aware of the upcoming elections and will try to blame the opponent so as to enhance its chances of winning (Toromade, 2018).

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<sup>4</sup> More on the Middle Belt in: Bagu & Smith (2017).

**“The fish stinks from the head down”:  
A political game led with the hands of society to protect own interests**

“We still ask ourselves what happened. What have we done? We had no history of violence [with the Fulani], we never had any clashes with them. The 19 February attack was the first. My house is like a home for the Fulanis, they come to play or watch movies with me and my family. So I still don’t know why it happened” – indicates a 65-year-old farmer in Kanikon Village, Kaduna State (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 11). Also a local official in Adamawa of the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria, the socio-cultural body representing Fulani herders in the country, notes that “there were problems in the past that had to do with cattle grazing on farmlands but these were settled amicably. But now there is no peace, no cooperation” (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 11).

If it is not known what a given problem is about and where it comes from, it is most likely about money and the protection of someone’s interests. The extreme poverty affecting nearly half of the Nigerian population shows that it is not about benefits of the society. The years of intensified economic recession in the country fell on the end of President Buhari’s (All Progressives Congress) term of office, as highlighted in particular by Atiku Abubakar (People’s Democratic Party), a millionaire fighting for 2019 election, who is expected to respond to the accusations of illegal siphoning of more than USD 40 million to the United States (Bankier, 2018). President Buhari’s governments have not only failed to lift the country out of economic collapse, but to establish an effective system to combat corruption and terror. The Corruption Perceptions Index 2018 places Nigeria 144<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries, giving it 27 out of 100 points<sup>5</sup> (Transparency International, 2018b). Even worse information for Nigeria is provided by the Global Terrorism Index, which in 2018 placed Nigeria on the third position among 163 countries. It was determined from data for 2017, showing that there were 411 attacks in which 1532 people died, and 852 were injured (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2018, p. 21). The above suggests that another of the rankings may be even less flattering, as the activity of Fulani extremists has intensified while maintaining Boko Haram’s activity.

The 2019 presidential election should be the breakthrough moment for the Nigerian people, since it may strongly determine the future of Nigeria. Nevertheless, there is no certainty that the maintenance of the current governments or changing them will bring any benefits to this country. Abubakar promises the financial

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<sup>5</sup> Where: 0 – highly corrupt, 100 – very clean.



“turbo-charging” (Bankier, 2019) in the struggle for the president’s seat, as the country is infamously at the forefront of poverty rankings for which he blames his rival, Buhari. The reforms announced by Abubakar may be a lifeline for Nigeria, but at the same time, they can strengthen the state’s corruption, which the author of the postulates is accused of. The willingness to increase pressure to support the private sector and create a tax system favorable to foreign investment, as well as an attempt to privatize unprofitable enterprises (Bankier, 2019) may become a means of further enrichment of the elite gathered around Abubakar. In the case of Nigeria, maintaining the current level of corruption also means further stealing from the state and keeping the infrastructure, health care and education system in ruin. According to the Archbishop of Abuja Catholic Diocese, John Cardinal Onaiye-kan, the return to democracy has brought not only endemic but also a systemic dimension to corruption in Nigerian politics. He emphasizes that “our politicians use religion and ethnicity to divide and distract us while they focus on plundering our national wealth and bleeding our national treasury”, while “the mismanagement, embezzlement, looting of our national resources is one of the most brazen stealing bazaars anywhere in the world” (Ajimotokan, 2019).

It should not be forgotten that political corruption in Nigeria is also linked to a lack of ability to fight terror and terrorism, and even to its sponsorship and tacit approval. A Fulani local official in Adamawa State said: “I want the government to live up to its responsibilities. If anyone commits a crime, they should be arrested and dealt with. But when people see, think and feel they can get away with crime, it does not only embolden them to do more but encourages others as well” (Amnesty International, 2018, p. 6). Meanwhile, the beginning of the year brought a series of further attacks performed by the Boko Haram organization in the city of Rann. One of them killed at least 60 people (Al Jazeera, 2019). It is pointed out that, even if the armed forces make every effort to stop the war officially initiated by Boko Haram in the north-east, there are still organizations with an economic interest in continuing the destabilization of the region (Aluko, 2018). Those who pay for the extremists of Fulani, thereby benefiting from it, are also in favor of the instability of the country. Will the next president be able to change the situation and will he show that will? The power in the state does not belong to an individual, but to a large number of politicians and officials at various levels, who (at least in part) fuel antagonisms in the society, maintain high level of unemployment and extreme poverty, and participate in the distribution of loot coming from the robbed state governed by them. Therefore, a closer relationship of the cattle-breeding elites with the extremists of Fulani, who will continue to be paid to spread terror among the civilian population, may be a risk factor. Another

problem is the change in the way Boko Haram operates and raises funds since it not only gains funds from “abductions for ransom, robberies, donations (membership dues, donation from politicians, government officials and other individual or organizations), extortion and financing through its network of alliances with other terrorist organizations” (Kingsly, Johnson-Rokosu, & Olanrewaju, 2015, p. 22851), but also from drug trafficking and cybercrime, using digital currency (like bitcoins) for money laundering (U.S. Department of State, 2018, p. 155). The above proves that it is a structure capable of adapting to new conditions and moving to a different level of action – in this case, among others, cyberspace – to sustain or increase profits.

## Conclusions

How is it possible that Africa’s largest economy is experiencing extreme poverty, which is fueling bloody struggles between members of different ethnic groups? Why, for so many years now, have the Nigerian authorities been unable to cope with the growing problems and allow new ones to emerge? It is hard to believe that this is happening unintentionally. Corruption exists because it is accepted by both parties – those who use the benefits of the authorities and the society, which does not demand change, but only allows to be manipulated. What effect does this have on internal security? It is appalling and brings unemployment, poverty, increased crime and the death of civilians as a result of the terrorist attacks carried out by Boko Haram and the acts of terror carried out in the country by the Fulani extremists. Based on the analysis carried out in the article, it can be concluded that political corruption not only gives consent to such activity but is also responsible for its co-financing or initiation.

The political manifesto of the candidate for the office of the President of Nigeria proclaims: “Let’s Get Nigeria Working Again”. For this to happen, his other, similar slogans should sound: “Let’s stop financing criminals”, “Let’s stop stealing from the state”, “Let’s stop dividing society”. Suppression of certain activities instead of undertaking further ones is likely to be a solution for Nigeria. To do so, politicians, officials, and businesspeople must start changes with themselves and begin taking real measures to fight corruption. Without this, the country will never be “working again”, terrorists and extremists will spread fear, and Nigeria will be at the forefront of all the terrorist, corruption and poverty rankings. However, it is hard to imagine that in a country where corruption is so deeply rooted and has been an integral part of politics for many years, politicians will suddenly

voluntarily stop participating in this practice and renounce illegal profits. According to Barrister Olusola Ebiseni, former three-term Environment Commissioner in Ondo, “the consciousness of such an ancient and a most populous indigenous African ethnic nationality as the Hausa, in recreating his nationality identity and handling his own destiny, may be the panacea for Nigerian peace and progress” (Ebiseni, 2018). Today, however, such a solution seems to be too idyllic.

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