



مركز الجزيرة للدراسات  
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## Report

# Nigerian presidential elections, what's at stake?

*Benjamin Augé \**

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Officials in President Goodluck Jonathan's administration who called for a postponement of the Nigerian elections [Reuters]

## Abstract

This report looks at the forthcoming presidential election in Nigeria, including the state of the country's political economy affected by the fight against the terror organization, Boko Haram, and the two main candidates' standing in the country. The election has just been delayed by Nigeria's Electoral Commission (NEC) to March 28, 2015 (the original date was February 14, 2015).

## Introduction

The flow of information depicting a one-sided image of Nigeria never stops. Mostly negative news seems to be produced almost every day by international media about this nation, the most populous country in Africa. Nigeria has since 2014 developed into the biggest economy of Africa<sup>(1)</sup>— ahead of South Africa. Such positive accounts of the country are generally omitted.

The incumbent President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan<sup>(2)</sup>, is eligible for re-election. He will contest the 2015 presidential election. It is therefore necessary to analyze his last five years in power, a time during which Boko Haram has grown into a formidable terrorist organisation; and the economy has increasingly shown worrying weaknesses despite its new continental statute. The current presidential campaign is very special. For the first time since democratisation has been launched in 1999, opposition is united behind one main candidate: Muhammadu Buhari<sup>(3)</sup>.

## Boko Haram, a growing monster

Created in 2002 by Mohamed Yusuf, the Islamic movement commonly known as Boko Haram has evolved into a terrorist group since 2009 when the army killed its leader in Maiduguri, the capital of Borno state (North-East). Since then, the strategy of the government of President Goodluck Jonathan, who took over from Umaru Yar'Adua after he passed away in 2010, can be summed up by a single slogan: more and more military and security measures. The lack of willingness for political discussions with key leaders of Boko Haram and the use of heavy arms against the organisation break into small groups, making it harder to understand and to control. Gradually, the identity of Boko Haram has passed from a religious movement calling for a strict observation of Sharia, law (which is already applied in twelve northern states of Nigeria since 1999/2000) and lobbying politicians of the north in that regard, to a terrorist group capable of sending young women with bombs in crowded markets to kill as many people as possible. The genuine religious message handled by hundreds of militants has shifted on the ground to a massive movement. That movement is now mainly driven by gangsters and transborder business. This has motivated recruits and this Boko Haram is growing thanks to chaos. Boko Haram has helped a mix of people with no common link to be united and to have a collective banner with hidden or not so hidden agendas such as in business (looting people on the ground and sidelined possible competition) or in politics (the fall of current president, a Christian coming from the South, Goodluck Jonathan). Boko Haram is suspected of being supported by some northern politicians, angry by their exclusion from power in Abuja. Their political exclusion, it is thought, prevents them from getting lucrative business contracts, such as in the oil sector. This sector of the economy has since 2010 been controlled by a very close ally of Goodluck Jonathan, the minister of petroleum resources, Diezani Alison-Madueke. Boko Haram might have been helped by some politicians who were four years ago dismayed by Goodluck Jonathan's advent to power. However, today it is quite hard to know if those politicians who supported the terrorist group at the beginning of Goodluck Jonathan's term in office still enjoy any influence on Boko Haram. For, Boko Haram's organisational structure and authority have through recent transformation become less pyramidal, mostly through increasing recruitment of leaders and soldiers.

To defeat Boko Haram, the budget of Nigeria defense and security agencies has risen from 100 billion Nairas (625 million \$) in 2010 to 1 trillion Nairas in 2012, 2013 and 2014(4). Growing militarisation of the conflict in the three main states, Borno, Adamawa and Yobe, where Boko Haram is very active and where the President, Goodluck Jonathan, has enforced the state of emergency since May 2013(5), has resulted in a spiral of violence. This has led to the army killing many civilians, often of individuals with no ties whatsoever to Boko Haram. Retaliation from the army, after soldier's massacres, and revenge from Boko Haram after some of their members have been killed by security forces are worsening a situation already tensed.

The expression of points of view, different from the military perspective, on how to handle the insurgency of Boko Haram is rare and 'shy' in Nigeria. The current National Security Adviser, Sambo Dasuki, who heads the country's state security bodies and who is tasked to advise the president on those matters, tried to propose an alternative anti-terrorist strategy during a press conference in March 2014(6). He pledged a counter terrorism strategy based on a "soft approach" as he calls it, to win the war against Boko Haram(7). He explained the urgent need to adapt the prison system to de-radicalise Boko Haram members (up to now, there is only limited experimentation with this approach in Kuje prisons near Abuja). He also advocated greater development efforts in northern Nigeria, especially the North-East region where Boko Haram has its base and where the economy has for decades been in a state of disarray. Most of the country's growth is concentrated around two main regions, the former capital Lagos where all the services, cultural infrastructures like Nollywood and headquarters of companies are located and the Niger Delta where all the oil and gas deposits have been found and developed since the late 1950s. The rest of Nigeria does not feature as importantly in the development strategy implemented by the federal government based in the capital, Abuja. The counter-terrorist strategy against Boko Haram would have been different if the insurgency took place in another region. For example, an amnesty was proposed to include 20 000 militants in the Niger Delta in 2009; the idea behind it was to stop the vandalism on oil and gas infrastructure, which was directly causing trouble for Nigeria's oil economy. So far, the strategy proposed by Sambo Dasuki has not had any real influence on government policy. Nigeria's counter-terrorist strategy is still mainly driven by military forces that are receiving huge state funds for very little result on the ground.

Boko Haram does not concern only Nigeria; it is a threat to the security of neighboring countries -- Cameroon, Niger and Chad. Cameroon is the most exposed as many attacks took place on the northern part of its territory. The wife of the current vice Prime Minister, Amadou Ali, was kidnapped in July 2014 after some members of the group were judged and put in prison by Cameroon's tribunals. It was also the case of the French family Moulin-Fournier, which was abducted in 2013 for a couple of months. In early February 2015, Niger has been for the first time directly affected by Boko Haram in the southern town of Diffa(8). These actions show how Boko Haram reach is becoming wider and transnational. Neighbouring countries are penetrated to kidnap westerners (they have almost entirely disappeared in northern Nigeria) and getting ransom income as well as to hide from the Nigerian army. Concrete actions have been very slow since the March 2014 Paris Summit where the presidents of Niger, Chad, Cameroon and Nigeria discussed a common strategy to defeat Boko Haram using the expression "total war" against the movement. The summit was necessary to ensure the presidents were consulting with one another (which was not the case before) in order to share intelligence and coordinate strategies to defeat the movement. However, on the ground, collective action has been insufficient until Chadian army –considered the most efficient



in the region - entered Cameroon soil on the 17th of January 2015 after Cameroon's President Paul Biya called his counterpart for help. Due to the growing threat for the whole region, Nigeria has even accepted since the 4th of February 2015 to open its borders to Chadian army(9). This demonstrates how serious the situation is, Nigerian army has for long, refused any involvement of troops from other states on its territory. In early February 2015, Nigeria, Benin, Chad, Cameroon and Niger have finally decided to gather 8700 soldiers to fight against Boko Haram(10).

This region is already plagued by many security worries coming from Libya and Mali. Boko Haram is not the only issue but one of several problems of common interest to the region's presidents. Moreover, neighbouring countries' security forces have largely considered Boko Haram to be first of all a national movement with national goals. However, the seize of Nigerian cities by Boko Haram such as Baga – close to Chadian border -has pushed president Idriss Déby to consider a direct involvement as the threat was now on just couple of kilometers from the capital Ndjamená.

### **Niger Delta, the damaged jewel of the federation**

Still more than 60% of the state revenues in Nigeria are coming from the oil and gas industry. For the government, the oil sector represents the backbone of the national economy, especially during these last twelve years, when oil prices remained very high. However, the Niger Delta region(11), which is made up of the nine oil-producing states, is plagued by the so-called "oil bunkering". A massive robbery organisation consisting of many networks, with access to customers, siphons the crude directly from pipelines and sell it to the refinery in the region, or refines it locally in very basic installations. The refined product is therefore sold on the local black market at very competitive prices compared to import subsidised fuel. The late President, Umaru Yar'Adua, proposed an amnesty in 2009 to the so-called "militants" who were vandalising oil and gas installations, seeking to put pressure on oil companies and government to get access to jobs and secure a better redistribution of oil wealth. The sabotage has almost stopped but the oil bunkering went completely out of control. In 2014, major oil companies' executives have frequently referred to 300 000 barrels per day of oil stolen, which is the equivalent of Congo's current oil production. These figures are really worrisome as they represent, around 12 billion dollars of loss for both government and oil companies, when an oil barrel was at 100 dollars. Due to that, oil bunkering and a lack of long term perspective in terms of legal framework, the Petroleum Industry Bill has been the subject of ongoing discussions since 2007. The oil majors like Shell(12), Chevron have massively divested and sold some of their onshore blocks during the current term of Goodluck Jonathan (2011-2015). ConocoPhillips even sold all its assets to the Nigerian firm Oando(13). It has already some consequences on the production that has dropped from 2.38 million b/d in 2012 to 2.2 million b/d in 2014. Even if the non-oil economy is

growing (service is 51% of GDP compared to industry with only 24%), oil income is vital for government to pay civil servants' salaries and construct key infrastructures in this country of 170 million inhabitants. Very few big oil projects are under development apart from Bonga South West by Shell that could add 200 000 b/d in five years' time. Moreover, with the current fall of barrel's price -- at around 45/50 dollars in February 2015 -- Nigeria might experience a very difficult year. The government did not manage to put money aside during the high price period. The "excess crude account", created in 2004 when oil price began its rise, and since 2011 managed by Nigeria Sovereign Investment Authority, holds today not more than two billion dollars(14).

### **The March presidential elections, a real suspense in sight?**

The March presidential election might be hard to organise in the states where Boko Haram is active; and it can also impact the ones where there are growing bombings and insecurity such as Kano state (the most populous of the federation but second after Lagos in terms of number of voters). However, it is not really a concern for Goodluck Jonathan's party, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) because those northern states will mostly be voting for opposition. Kano, Borno, Adamawa(15), and Yobe are governed by opposition leader. The Boko Haram insurgency may drastically lower voter turnout in these state and could reduce the chance of the opposition presidential candidate, Muhammadou Buhari. The latter has been selected during a poll in December 2014 in Lagos where thousands of militants endorsed him as the main opposition candidate facing the current president. Muhammadou Buhari is a former General who has already ruled the country between 1983 and 1985. For the first time since dictatorship has been ended in 1998 with the death of Sani Abacha, the opposition is united behind one single flagship (the All Progressives Congress, APC) and one main candidate. The People's Democratic Party which has ruled the country since 1999 will face a real challenge to beat its APC adversary.

However, PDP still has many cards in its pocket. First, as said before, the core opposition constituencies are suffering from a chaotic environment due to Boko Haram's insurgency. Second, as President, Goodluck Jonathan has access to massive funds and can use the gigantic PDP machinery and networks throughout Nigeria where partisans are active in all thirty-six states. Third, critics against Muhammadu Buhari are numerous and PDP will not pass the opportunity to use them as often as possible: he took over power after a military coup in 1983, he failed three times as presidential candidate in previous elections (2003, 2007 and 2011), he is too old (72); and since Buhari is Muslim, some PDP leaders try to scare voters, saying that he would exclude Christians if he won the presidency. Finally, on issue like Boko Haram, Buhari is playing the card of the experience having had a military career. However, a precise strategy is still lacking

even if the opposition candidate might have the ability to impose his views on the security apparatus contrary to Goodluck Jonathan.

The outcome of the March presidential election will not be influenced by the achievements of the current President but more by the capacity of PDP to control the process, to use its power (money and organisation) to attract votes. APC has a card to play by using adequately its frontrunner networks (governors of major states such as Lagos, Kano, Rivers), the speaker of parliament Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, former Vice-president Atiku Abubakar and others. However, as some of them are former PDP like Atiku Abubakar, Aminu Waziri Tambuwal or Rotimi Amaechi from Rivers, their main weakness is the lack of common vision and program. Criticising a party can be tough when lots of the critics had until very recently been members of the regime. It could be understood by voters as an opportunist move driven by lack of opportunity for a better career within the party they left, the PDP. This argument is used by PDP to discredit APC.

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\* **Benjamin Augé** holds a Phd in geopolitics from the French Institute of Geopolitics (Paris 8 University), he is a Fellow in the Africa and Energy Programs of the French institute of International Relations (Ifri).

#### Endnotes

- 1) <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21600685-nigerias-suddenly-supersized-economy-indeed-wonder-so-are-its-still-huge> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 2) Goodluck Jonathan was born in 1957 in Bayelsa state in the Niger Delta where he has been a governor from 2005 until 2007. Before being elected President in 2011, he was vice-president in 2007 and acting president since 2010. He received a Phd in zoology from Port Harcourt University in Rivers state. He is from Ijaw ethnic group which is one of the biggest in the South geopolitical region of Nigeria with a population of nearly 10 million people.
- 3) Muhammadou Buhari is a retired general who ruled the country between 1983 and 1985.
- 4) International Crisis Group, "Curbing violence in Nigeria II: the Boko Haram insurgency", Report n° 216, 3 April 2014.
- 5) <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/again-jonathan-extends-emergency-rule-in-borno-yobe-adamawa/178501/> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 6) This strategy has been developed once again by Sambu Dasuki in a conference in Chatham House in London on the 22th of January 2015.
- 7) <http://ireports-ng.com/2014/03/18/nigerias-soft-approach-to-counterterrorism-by-mohammed-sambo-dasuki/> .
- 8) <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2015/02/boko-haram-attacks-border-town-niger-150206124054962.html> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 9) <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/chadian-troops-kill-over-200-boko-haram-insurgents/201043/> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 10) <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2015/02/07/uk-nigeria-violence-cameroon-idUKKBN0LB0RY20150207> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 11) This region has been producing oil and gas since 1958 but has suffered from widespread and continuous pollutions as a result of oil spills. They have been caused by bad maintenance of the onshore oil pipelines by the majors and due to vandalism on these installations by theft who are siphoning the crude. The soil and the water have been deeply impacted by the pollution and many farmers and fishermen have lost their job. Moreover, whereas Niger Delta is endowed with huge

reserves of oil and gas, the electricity is missing because of a quasi-absence of gas network, oil companies preferring flaring the gas (even if it's forbidden by law) as the purchase price offered by Nigerian state doesn't worth the investment according to private sectors.

- 12) <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/shell-concludes-sale-of-oil-blocks-to-aiteo-erotron-others/191927/> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 13) <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/7f5454c4-1734-11e4-b0d7-00144feabdc0.html> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 14) <http://www.premiumtimesng.com/business/175125-nigerias-excess-crude-account-2-45-bn.html> (accessed on 12 February 2015).
- 15) The governor is from opposition but Goodluck Jonathan got a higher number of votes during last presidential elections in 2011 than his direct opponents, Muhammadu Buhari.