Why Economic Exclusion Becomes Insurgency: Relative Deprivation and the Rise of Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria

By

Aja Innocent Ngene
Department of Political Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ikwo, Nigeria

Alita Emmanuel Chinagorom
Department of Political Science, Alex Ekwueme Federal University Ikwo, Nigeria

Ekuma James O.

Abstract

Why does economic exclusion in North-East Nigeria repeatedly translate into insurgent violence rather than peaceful political contestation? This study addresses this question by rethinking Boko Haram not as a product of poverty alone, but as an outcome of structurally reproduced exclusion embedded in inequality, livelihood collapse, and human capital decay. Drawing on empirical literature and conflict research, the study argues that low income and unemployment function less as direct causes of insurgency and more as structural enablers that lower the threshold for recruitment into violent networks. Their effects become politically consequential only when intensified by horizontal inequalities that regionalize deprivation and convert economic disadvantage into collective grievance. The analysis further shows that insurgent recruitment in North-East Nigeria is increasingly shaped by survival logics rather than ideological commitment. The breakdown of agricultural livelihoods, informal markets, and local economic systems under conditions of prolonged conflict produces a context in which participation in Boko Haram becomes, for some actors, an adaptive response to economic collapse rather than an ideological choice. More critically, the study identifies educational exclusion as the central mechanism of insurgency persistence. Disrupted schooling, low enrolment, and chronic deficits in human capital reproduction ensure a continuous supply of vulnerable youth while simultaneously weakening long-term reintegration and recovery pathways. In this sense, education is not merely a background variable but a structural condition that stabilizes

insurgency over time. The study concludes that Boko Haram is sustained by a self-reinforcing political economy of exclusion, in which inequality produces grievance, livelihood collapse produces survival recruitment, and educational deprivation reproduces vulnerability across generations. It contributes to conflict scholarship by reframing insurgency as a structurally embedded system of socio-economic reproduction rather than episodic radicalization.

Keywords: Boko Haram, relative deprivation, inequality, livelihood collapse, human capital.

Introduction

The persistence of insurgent violence in North-East Nigeria, particularly the emergence and consolidation of Boko Haram, remains one of the most enduring security challenges in contemporary African political economy. While early explanations largely framed the group through the lens of religious extremism and ideological radicalization, more recent scholarship has increasingly turned toward structural interpretations that emphasize socio-economic exclusion, governance failure, and uneven development. Yet, despite this shift, the precise mechanisms through which economic exclusion translates into violent mobilization remain insufficiently theorized.

Empirical evidence suggests that the North-East region exhibits some of the most severe socio-economic deprivations in Nigeria. Data from the World Bank (2022) and Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics indicate disproportionately high poverty rates, youth unemployment, and low educational attainment relative to national averages. These structural conditions have been widely acknowledged in development literature as potential drivers of fragility. However, as Collier and Hoeffler (2004) argue, poverty alone does not automatically generate conflict; rather, it is the interaction between economic opportunity structures and grievance formation that shapes the likelihood of insurgency.

Within the conflict literature, the concept of Relative Deprivation Theory remains central to understanding this transition. As articulated by Gurr (1970), collective violence emerges not simply from objective deprivation but from perceived discrepancies between expected and actual socio-economic conditions. This

theoretical insight has been further refined by contemporary conflict scholars who emphasize the importance of perceived injustice in shaping political mobilization (Cederman, Gleditsch & Buhaug, 2013).

In the case of Boko Haram, studies such as Onuoha (2014) and Thurston (2017) have demonstrated that the group's expansion cannot be understood solely through religious ideology, but must be situated within broader contexts of youth marginalization, state absence, and socio-economic exclusion in Northern Nigeria. Similarly, Pérouse de Montclos (2014) highlights that recruitment dynamics are closely tied to local grievances and survival conditions rather than abstract ideological commitment.

Despite these contributions, existing literature tends to treat economic exclusion as a background condition rather than a dynamic causal mechanism. There is limited analytical integration of how low per capita income, unemployment, inequality, and livelihood deprivation interact to produce recruitment-ready environments for insurgent organizations.

Against this backdrop, this study investigates the relationship between economic exclusion and the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in North-East Nigeria, focusing specifically on how structural deprivation conditions translate into mobilization potential. The study is guided by the following objectives:

i. To examine how structural economic exclusion (income deprivation and unemployment) contributes to the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in North-East Nigeria.
ii. To analyze how economic inequality and livelihood insecurity shape grievance formation and insurgent mobilization in the region.
iii. To investigate how educational deprivation functions as a reinforcing mechanism in sustaining Boko Haram recruitment and expansion.

Conceptual Framework

This study is anchored in Relative Deprivation Theory, but extends it beyond its classical formulation to explain not only the emergence of grievance, but the conditions under which such grievance becomes organized violence. While Gurr's (1970) original thesis remains foundational in linking perceived deprivation to

political unrest, its explanatory power lies less in the mere existence of deprivation than in its transformation into collective action. The critical analytical task, therefore, is to specify the mechanisms through which economic exclusion becomes insurgent mobilization. At its core, relative deprivation refers to the perceived gap between expected and actual socio-economic conditions. However, as later scholarship demonstrates, this perception is neither automatic nor uniform. Cederman, Gleditsch, and Buhaug (2013) refine the concept by emphasizing *horizontal inequalities* group-based disparities in access to economic and political resources as particularly potent drivers of conflict. In such contexts, deprivation is not experienced as individual misfortune but as collective injustice, thereby creating a shared grievance capable of underpinning mobilization.

Yet, grievance alone does not produce insurgency. A long-standing critique within conflict studies, most notably advanced by Collier and Hoeffler (2004), is that grievance-based explanations risk overstating the causal role of deprivation while underestimating the importance of opportunity structures. From this perspective, rebellion is more likely where the costs of participation are low and the potential benefits material or symbolic are perceived to be attainable. This critique is important, but it does not invalidate grievance; rather, it suggests that deprivation must intersect with enabling conditions to produce violence.

To reconcile these positions, this study conceptualizes insurgency as the outcome of a three-stage causal process.

First, structural economic exclusion manifested in low income levels, unemployment, and limited access to livelihoods generates conditions of sustained deprivation. In North-East Nigeria, these conditions are not episodic but systemic, reinforcing a sense of long-term marginalization. As Meagher (2013) argues in the context of informal economies, chronic exclusion from formal economic structures produces not only material hardship but also a weakening of state–society linkages, thereby eroding institutional legitimacy. Second, these conditions give rise to grievance formation, mediated through perceptions of injustice and inequality. Here, deprivation becomes politically salient when individuals interpret their condition as the result of structural neglect or exclusion. This aligns with the argument advanced by Stewart (2008) that inequalities across

regions and groups particularly when persistent are more likely to generate conflict than aggregate poverty levels. In the North-East, disparities in development relative to other regions of Nigeria contribute to a perception of systemic marginalization, reinforcing the cognitive basis for collective grievance. Third, and most critically, grievance translates into mobilization when individuals encounter viable pathways for action. In this stage, insurgent organizations such as Boko Haram function as both vehicles and amplifiers of grievance. As Kalyvas (2006) demonstrates, participation in violence is often shaped by local dynamics, including coercion, social networks, and survival incentives, rather than purely ideological commitment. Complementing this, empirical studies on Boko Haram (Onuoha, 2014; Pérouse de Montclos, 2014) show that recruitment is frequently driven by economic vulnerability, limited livelihood alternatives, and the search for social protection. This three-stage framework exclusion, grievance, mobilization provides a more integrated explanation of insurgency than approaches that privilege either structural conditions or agency in isolation. It allows for a nuanced understanding of how economic deprivation becomes actionable, not automatically, but through socially mediated processes that lower the threshold for participation in violence.

Importantly, this framework also accommodates the role of education and human capital deficits as reinforcing mechanisms within the mobilization process. Educational deprivation limits access to formal employment and reduces exposure to alternative socio-political narratives, thereby increasing susceptibility to recruitment. As argued by Thurston (2017), Boko Haram's early appeal was partly rooted in its critique of Western education and its ability to resonate within communities already excluded from formal educational structures. This conceptualization moves beyond deterministic accounts of poverty and conflict. It demonstrates that insurgency emerges not from deprivation per se, but from the interaction between structural exclusion, perceived injustice, and accessible pathways for mobilization. In doing so, it provides the analytical foundation for examining how economic exclusion in North-East Nigeria is transformed into sustained insurgent activity.

Political Economy of Exclusion in North-East Nigeria

The structural conditions underpinning insurgent mobilization in North-East Nigeria are rooted in a long-standing pattern of regional economic marginalization that predates the emergence of Boko Haram. While Nigeria as a whole exhibits significant development challenges, the distribution of poverty, unemployment, and human capital deficits is highly uneven, with the North-East consistently ranking among the most deprived regions in the country. This spatial inequality provides a critical empirical foundation for understanding how economic exclusion acquires political and security significance.

Data from the World Bank and Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics indicate that poverty in the North-East is both deep and multidimensional. The National Bureau of Statistics' 2022 Multidimensional Poverty Index reports that states such as Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa record some of the highest poverty incidences nationally, with deprivation extending beyond income to include limited access to healthcare, education, and basic infrastructure. These conditions reflect not merely low income levels but systemic exclusion from formal economic participation. Unemployment and underemployment further compound this structural vulnerability. Although national labour statistics often mask regional disparities, disaggregated data reveal significantly higher rates of youth unemployment in Northern Nigeria. As World Bank (2022) notes, the lack of formal job opportunities in the region has contributed to the expansion of informal and precarious economic activities, particularly among young men. This condition aligns with broader political economy arguments that link labour market exclusion to increased susceptibility to non-state armed group recruitment, especially where alternative livelihood pathways are constrained.

Inequality both inter-regional and intra-regional adds a further layer of complexity. While Nigeria's overall inequality levels are high, the disparities between the North and other regions reinforce perceptions of systemic neglect. Stewart (2008) argues that such horizontal inequalities are particularly conflict-inducing because they are experienced collectively rather than individually. In the Nigerian case, the North-East's relative deprivation compared to more economically developed regions such as the South-West and South-South contributes to a shared sense of marginalization that extends beyond material

conditions into political consciousness. Educational deprivation represents another critical dimension of this exclusionary structure. Northern Nigeria, and the North-East in particular, records some of the lowest literacy and school enrolment rates in the country. According to UNICEF (2021), millions of children in Northern Nigeria remain out of school, with the highest concentrations in conflict-affected states. This deficit is not only a development concern but also a security variable, as limited access to education constrains upward mobility and reduces exposure to alternative worldviews, thereby reinforcing cycles of vulnerability.

These structural conditions are further exacerbated by weak state presence and limited institutional capacity. As Meagher (2013) observes, regions characterised by economic exclusion often experience a parallel erosion of state legitimacy, as citizens perceive limited returns from formal governance structures. In North-East Nigeria, this dynamic has been intensified by decades of underinvestment in infrastructure, social services, and economic development, creating governance vacuums that insurgent groups can exploit.

Importantly, these conditions do not operate in isolation; rather, they interact cumulatively to produce what may be described as a high-risk socio-economic environment. Low income, unemployment, inequality, and educational deprivation collectively reinforce a structure of exclusion in which survival becomes precarious and state institutions appear distant or ineffective. Within such contexts, the threshold for insurgent mobilization is significantly lowered, not necessarily because individuals are ideologically predisposed to violence, but because the opportunity cost of participation is reduced.

Thus, the political economy of North-East Nigeria provides more than background context constitutes the structural foundation upon which processes of grievance formation and insurgent recruitment are built. Understanding this environment is essential for explaining why Boko Haram was able to transform from a fringe movement into a sustained insurgent force embedded within local socio-economic realities.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative explanatory research design grounded in political economy analysis. Rather than relying on primary data collection, it draws on secondary data from authoritative institutional sources, including the World Bank, Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics, and UNICEF, alongside peer-reviewed scholarly literature on insurgency and conflict. The methodological approach is based on analytical synthesis, combining socio-economic indicators (poverty, unemployment, inequality, and education) with established conflict theories to explain patterns of insurgent emergence. Rather than seeking statistical generalization, the study prioritizes causal interpretation, examining how structural economic conditions in North-East Nigeria generate environments conducive to grievance formation and mobilization. This approach is consistent with qualitative traditions in conflict studies that emphasize mechanism-based explanation over variable correlation (Gerring, 2012; Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). By integrating empirical data with theoretical insight, the study provides a contextually grounded explanation of how economic exclusion translates into insurgent recruitment dynamics.

Economic Exclusion and Insurgent Mobilization in North-East Nigeria

The relationship between economic exclusion and the rise of Boko Haram is best understood not as a direct causal chain, but as a mediated process in which structural deprivation interacts with recruitment opportunities and institutional weakness. Recent scholarship increasingly demonstrates that poverty, in isolation, does not generate insurgency; rather, it creates conditions under which mobilization becomes more feasible when combined with social vulnerability and exposure to armed networks. Empirical evidence from North-East Nigeria supports this position. Drawing on field-based data from Borno State, Ikpe et al. (2023) show that individuals embedded in conditions of economic vulnerability particularly unemployed and underemployed youth are significantly more exposed to recruitment environments than their economically secure counterparts. Their findings suggest that deprivation operates less as a trigger and more as a conditioning factor, increasing susceptibility to mobilization when combined with local conflict dynamics.

Unemployment, in particular, plays a central role in lowering the opportunity cost of insurgent participation. In regions where formal labour markets are weak or absent, the absence of stable income-generating opportunities reduces the economic risks associated with joining armed groups. As Blattman and Miguel (2010) argue in their broader analysis of civil conflict, environments characterized by low income and limited employment opportunities tend to produce larger pools of individuals for whom participation in violence is comparatively less costly. In the North-East Nigerian context, this dynamic is especially pronounced among young men who face limited prospects for upward mobility. However, economic incentives alone do not sufficiently explain recruitment patterns. More recent analyses highlight the importance of framing and narrative construction in converting economic hardship into mobilization. Osisanwo (2024) demonstrates that Boko Haram's communicative strategies consistently frame poverty and marginalization as evidence of state failure, thereby transforming material deprivation into moral and political grievance. This narrative linkage is critical: it reinterprets economic exclusion not as an individual condition, but as a collective injustice requiring redress.

At the same time, recruitment processes often operate through a combination of inducement and coercion. Pérouse de Montclos (2014) and Thurston (2017) both note that Boko Haram's expansion involved not only voluntary enlistment but also forced recruitment, particularly in rural and conflict-affected communities. In such contexts, economic vulnerability increases not only willingness to join but also exposure to coercive recruitment practices, as individuals lack the resources and institutional protection necessary to resist. The economic consequences of the insurgency itself further reinforce these dynamics, producing a feedback loop between deprivation and violence. Studies on the economic impact of Boko Haram indicate that the destruction of agricultural systems, displacement of populations, and disruption of local markets have significantly deepened poverty in the region (World Bank, 2022). This deterioration of livelihoods expands the pool of vulnerable individuals, thereby sustaining recruitment over time.

Beyond individual-level deprivation, regional inequality plays a crucial role in shaping mobilization. As Stewart (2008) argues, horizontal inequalities particularly those structured along regional lines are more likely to generate

conflict because they foster shared perceptions of marginalization. In Nigeria, the developmental gap between the North-East and more economically advanced regions contributes to a broader sense of exclusion that insurgent groups actively exploit. This perception of systemic neglect reinforces the grievance structures necessary for sustained mobilization.The evidence indicates that economic exclusion functions as a multidimensional driver of insurgency. It reduces the opportunity cost of participation, increases exposure to recruitment networks, and provides the discursive foundation for grievance construction. However, its effects are contingent upon the presence of enabling conditions, including weak state institutions, coercive recruitment structures, and narratives that frame deprivation as injustice.

Thus, Boko Haram's rise cannot be explained by poverty alone. Rather, it reflects the interaction between structural economic marginalization and the social and organizational mechanisms that convert deprivation into insurgent mobilization. In this sense, economic exclusion does not determine violence, but it significantly lowers the barriers to participation, making insurgency both possible and, in certain contexts, rational.

Inequality, Livelihood Collapse, and Recruitment Pathways

While general economic deprivation creates conditions of vulnerability, it is the interaction between inequality and livelihood collapse that more directly structures pathways into insurgent recruitment in North-East Nigeria. This distinction is critical. Not all poor societies experience insurgency; rather, conflict is more likely where deprivation is experienced alongside relative disadvantage and economic dislocation, producing both grievance and survival pressures.

Inequality, particularly in its horizontal form, plays a central role in this process. As Stewart (2008) argues, group-based disparities in access to economic and social resources generate collective grievances that are more politically salient than individual poverty. In the Nigerian context, the persistent developmental gap between the North-East and other regions reinforces a perception of systemic exclusion, which insurgent groups exploit in constructing narratives of marginalization. More recent empirical work by Cederman, Weidmann, and Gleditsch (2011) further demonstrates that regions characterized by pronounced

inequality are significantly more prone to conflict onset, as disparities heighten both grievance intensity and mobilization potential.

However, inequality alone does not explain recruitment. Its effects become more pronounced when combined with livelihood collapse, particularly in agrarian economies such as those of North-East Nigeria. The region's economic structure is heavily dependent on subsistence agriculture, livestock rearing, and informal trade. Disruptions to these systems whether due to environmental stress, market dislocation, or violence have profound consequences for household survival. As Raleigh (2010) notes, the breakdown of local livelihood systems can generate acute economic shocks that increase the likelihood of participation in armed conflict, especially where alternative coping mechanisms are limited.

In the case of Boko Haram, the insurgency has both exploited and intensified these dynamics. Studies by International Crisis Group (2016) show that the destruction of rural economies, restrictions on movement, and loss of agricultural productivity in Borno and surrounding states significantly reduced livelihood options for local populations. This has created conditions in which joining or cooperating with armed groups may function as a survival strategy rather than an ideological choice. Similarly, research by Food and Agriculture Organization (2017) highlights how conflict-induced displacement and food insecurity have further eroded economic resilience in the region.

These conditions produce what may be described as survival-driven recruitment pathways. Unlike grievance-based mobilization, which is rooted in perceived injustice, survival-based recruitment is shaped by immediate material necessity. Individuals facing acute livelihood insecurity may engage with insurgent groups for access to food, protection, or income, even in the absence of ideological alignment. This aligns with the findings of Justino (2012), who argues that participation in armed groups is often driven by short-term economic incentives and survival considerations, particularly in contexts of state failure.

At the same time, inequality and livelihood collapse interact to reinforce each other. As conflict disrupts economic activity, it disproportionately affects already marginalized communities, deepening existing inequalities. This cumulative effect

not only expands the pool of vulnerable individuals but also strengthens the grievance narratives that underpin insurgent mobilization. In this sense, inequality does not merely precede conflict; it is reproduced and intensified through it.

Importantly, these dynamics are mediated by the absence or weakness of state institutions. In contexts where formal social protection systems are limited or ineffective, individuals are left to navigate economic shocks without institutional support. As Meagher (2013) observes, the erosion of state capacity in economically marginalized regions often leads to the emergence of alternative governance structures, including those provided by non-state armed groups. Boko Haram, at various points, has attempted to fill such gaps by offering forms of economic redistribution and local governance, further embedding itself within affected communities.

Thus, recruitment into Boko Haram cannot be understood solely through the lens of ideology or coercion. It must also be situated within a broader political economy of survival, where inequality and livelihood collapse create conditions under which participation in insurgency becomes a viable, if precarious, strategy. In this framework, economic exclusion operates not only as a source of grievance but as a material constraint that shapes individual decision-making, linking structural conditions directly to recruitment pathways.

Education, Human Capital Deficit, and Insurgency Sustainability

The persistence of Boko Haram cannot be adequately explained by economic deprivation alone; rather, it is sustained by a deeper and more enduring structural condition the systematic erosion of human capital through educational exclusion. While poverty may facilitate initial recruitment, it is the absence of educational access and capability formation that reproduces vulnerability across time, ensuring a continuous supply of recruits within conflict-affected regions. Recent evidence underscores the scale of this educational crisis. According to UNICEF (2021), Nigeria accounts for one of the highest numbers of out-of-school children globally, with the North-East disproportionately affected. This is not merely a developmental deficit but a structural condition with direct security implications. In regions where access to formal education is limited or disrupted, individuals

are systematically excluded from pathways to social mobility, formal employment, and civic integration conditions that increase susceptibility to alternative, often violent, forms of organization.

The relationship between education and insurgency is further reinforced by the deliberate targeting of educational institutions by Boko Haram itself. As documented by Human Rights Watch (2024), attacks on schools, abductions of students, and threats against teachers have continued to undermine educational access across northern Nigeria. Since 2014, over 1,600 children have been abducted from schools, while persistent insecurity forces families to withdraw children from formal education altogether. This pattern reflects not incidental violence, but a strategic effort to dismantle alternative systems of knowledge that could challenge insurgent ideology. Empirical research increasingly shows that conflict and education are mutually reinforcing. A recent study in *World Development* demonstrates that exposure to violent conflict in Nigeria significantly reduces educational attainment, with repeated conflict events leading to measurable losses in years of schooling (Justino et al., 2024). The implication is critical: conflict does not only emerge from weak human capital it actively reproduces it. As schooling declines, so too does the capacity of individuals to access formal economic structures, thereby reinforcing the very conditions that sustain insurgency.

Beyond access, the absence of education shapes cognitive and ideological vulnerability. Education is not simply a mechanism for skill acquisition; it also provides the analytical tools necessary to interrogate narratives, evaluate information, and resist manipulation. Where such capacities are absent, individuals are more likely to internalize simplified or absolutist interpretations of social and political realities. Recent work by Salihu and Shodunke (2024) highlights how prolonged exposure to conflict environments, combined with weak educational foundations, produces populations marked by psychological trauma, social dislocation, and limited critical agency conditions that facilitate recruitment and ideological entrenchment. Importantly, the structure of education in Northern Nigeria further complicates this dynamic. The coexistence of formal and informal educational systems has produced uneven integration into modern economic and institutional frameworks. While religious education plays a significant cultural role, its limited linkage to formal labour markets constrains

economic opportunities, reinforcing cycles of marginalization. In this context, the absence of functional human capital is not simply a matter of access, but of systemic disconnection between education and economic inclusion.

The long-term implication is that education functions as a temporal stabilizer of insurgency. Unlike immediate economic shocks, which may fluctuate, deficits in human capital endure across generations. Each cohort excluded from education reproduces the structural conditions of vulnerability, ensuring that insurgent groups retain access to new recruits even as older members are eliminated or disengage. This aligns with broader conflict literature, which identifies low human capital as a key factor in prolonging civil conflicts by sustaining recruitment pools and reducing the opportunity cost of participation (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004).

Moreover, the absence of education undermines post-conflict recovery efforts. Reintegration programmes for former combatants depend heavily on literacy, vocational skills, and social reintegration capacity. Where these are lacking, disengaged individuals face limited prospects, increasing the likelihood of re-entry into violent networks. Thus, educational exclusion not only sustains insurgency but also weakens the effectiveness of counterinsurgency and peacebuilding interventions.

Conclusion

This study set out to interrogate a question often treated with analytical imprecision: how and why economic exclusion translates into insurgent violence in North-East Nigeria. The findings resist reductionist explanations. Poverty, in and of itself, does not produce insurgency. Rather, Boko Haram's emergence and persistence are best understood as the outcome of a layered interaction between relative deprivation, livelihood collapse, and structural deficits in human capital, each operating through distinct but mutually reinforcing mechanisms. At the foundational level, economic exclusion conditions vulnerability. Low income and unemployment do not automatically generate violence, but they reduce the opportunity cost of participation and increase exposure to recruitment networks. This vulnerability is sharpened by inequality, particularly in its regional and group-based forms, which transforms deprivation into a politically salient grievance. In the Nigerian context, the enduring developmental asymmetry

between the North-East and other regions provides the discursive and material basis upon which insurgent narratives of marginalization are constructed and sustained.

Yet, grievance alone is insufficient to explain mobilization. The analysis demonstrates that livelihood collapse driven by conflict, displacement, and the erosion of local economies—creates survival-driven recruitment pathways in which participation in insurgency becomes, for some, a rational response to material precarity. Boko Haram's ability to embed itself within these conditions reflects not only its ideological appeal but its capacity to operate as an alternative economic and governance structure in contexts where the state is absent or ineffective.

Crucially, the persistence of the insurgency is anchored in the region's profound educational deficit. The systematic erosion of human capital exacerbated by targeted attacks on schools and prolonged disruption of education reproduces vulnerability across generations. In this sense, education emerges not as a peripheral variable but as a temporal mechanism of conflict reproduction, sustaining recruitment long after initial grievances have formed. Insurgency endures where the structural conditions that generate it remain intact. The broader implication is that Boko Haram is not simply a security problem; it is a manifestation of a deeper political economy of exclusion. Responses that privilege military containment without addressing the underlying structures of inequality, economic dislocation, and educational deprivation are unlikely to yield durable outcomes. What is required is a shift from reactive counterinsurgency to structural prevention one that integrates economic inclusion, livelihood restoration, and sustained investment in human capital as central pillars of national security. More fundamentally, the study contributes to ongoing debates in conflict studies by reaffirming a critical insight: violence is rarely the product of deprivation alone, but of how deprivation is experienced, interpreted, and organized within specific institutional and social contexts. In North-East Nigeria, it is this convergence between material exclusion, perceived injustice, and institutional absence that renders insurgency both possible and enduring.

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