

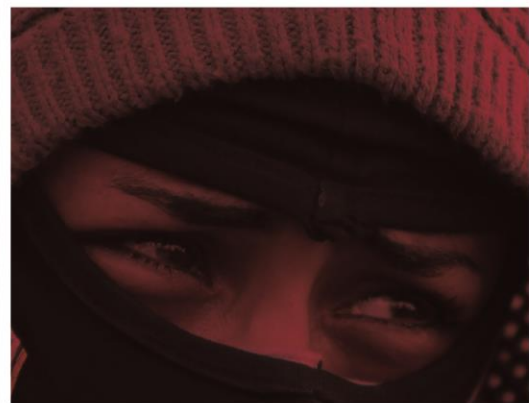
FACT SHEET

BOKO HARAM

NIGERIAN ISLAMIST GROUP

Origins | Objectives | Links to al-Qaeda | Major Attacks | Strength | Other Resources

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BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

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BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

ORIGINS

Boko Haram, which means “Western education is forbidden,” was founded in 2002 by an Islamist cleric named Mohammed Yusuf in response to Nigeria’s democratic transition, nationalism and Western influence.

The group’s official name is not Boko Haram but Jama’atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda’awati wal-Jihad, which means “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad.” Members are known to reference the Islamic verse that states, “Anyone who is not governed by what Allah has revealed is among the transgressors.”

Osama Bin Laden invested¹ \$3 million in northern Nigeria, where Muslims are the majority, to promote his brand of Salafist Islamism. Bin Laden also endorsed an Islamist revolution in order to topple the Nigerian government and establish a *sharia*-based state.

Yusuf had an estimated² 280,000 followers and his armed supporters were referred to as the Nigerian Taliban and dozens trained in Afghanistan. Yusuf was killed in 2009 and replaced by its current leader, Abubakar Shekau.

In November 2013, the U.S. State Department designated Boko Haram as a Foreign Terrorist Organization, as well as a splinter group named Ansaru. The U.S. government said Boko Haram has links to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and is responsible for killing thousands of people.³



¹ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/11/boko-haram-s-bin-laden-connection.html>

² <http://almanac.afpc.org/boko-haram>

³ <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/finally-us-names-boko-haram-foreign-terrorist-organization>

BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

OBJECTIVES

The immediate objective of Boko Haram is to establish strict *sharia* law in northern Nigeria, where the majority of the population is Muslim. Although the twelve northern states have implemented *sharia* governance, Boko Haram believes it is too lenient and violates Islam.

Islamist ideology holds that Muslims are required to wage *jihad* until all territory once under Muslim rule is returned. Boko Haram regards itself as the successor to Usman Dan Fodio who founded the Sokoto Caliphate, which ruled parts of Nigeria, Niger and Cameroon from 1804 until it was formally abolished by the British in 1904. Boko Haram regards the current Sultan of Sokoto, who has a traditional religious and tribal role, as un-Islamic as he cooperates with the Nigerian government. Boko Haram wants to concentrate all religious authority in their own hands.



However, like all Islamists, Boko Haram's ultimate objective is to bring all of mankind under *sharia* law. Yusuf preached⁴ that a *sharia* state "should be established in Nigeria, and if possible all over the world, through preaching the faith (dawa')."

Boko Haram pledges its allegiance to Al-Qaeda. According to the Al-Qaeda Reader,⁵ Osama Bin Laden once said, "In fact, Muslims are obligated to raid the land of the infidels, occupy

⁴ <http://almanac.afpc.org/boko-haram>

⁵ http://www.amazon.com/Qaeda-Reader-Essential-Terrorist-Organization-ebook/dp/B000UOJTY4/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1397783114&sr=8-1&keywords=al-qaeda+reader

BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

them, and exchange their systems of governance for an Islamic system, barring any practice that contradicts the *sharia* from being publicly voiced among the people, as was the case at the dawn of Islam.”



Bin Laden also said:

“There are only three choices in Islam: either willing submission [conversion]; or payment of the *jizya*, through physical though not spiritual submission to the authority of Islam; or the sword— for it is not right to let him live. The matter is summed up for every person alive: either submit, or live under the suzerainty of Islam, or die.”

Boko Haram has specifically identified the U.S. and other Western countries as eventual targets.

In November 2012, Abubakar Shekau declared, “O America, die with your fury” and he pledged to fight “the Jews and the Crusader Christians.” As the *Long War Journal* summarizes, he “said he and his fighters support jihad in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Kashmir, Chechnya, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Somalia, Algeria, Libya and Mali.”⁶



In April 2014, Shekau said in a videotaped address that Boko Haram is committed to waging war on Christianity and democracy as a whole:⁷

“We know what is happening in this world, it is a Jihad war against Christians and Christianity. It is a war against Western education,

democracy and constitution... This is what I know in Quran. This is a war against Christians and democracy and their constitution, Allah says we should finish them when we get them.”

⁶ http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/11/boko_haram_emir_prai.php

⁷ <http://www.cknnigeria.com/2014/05/full-english-transcript-of-boko-haram.html>

BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

LINKS TO AL-QAEDA

The strength of the organizational connection to al-Qaeda is debated among experts.⁸ However, the ideological link is incontestable.

As mentioned above, Osama Bin Laden invested \$3 million in northern Nigeria, where Muslims are the majority, to promote his brand of Salafist Islamism.

The group's main spokesperson, Abu Qaqa, publicly said in January 2012 that Boko Haram is a "spiritual follower" of Al-Qaeda.⁹ The connection to al-Qaeda goes far beyond just ideological similarities. The spokesman said, "...al-Qaeda are our elder brothers... our leader traveled to Saudi Arabia and met al-Qaeda there. We enjoy financial and technical support from them. Anything we want from them, we ask."



In late September or early August 2013, Boko Haram leaders participated in a secret conference call that included 20 top Al-Qaeda operatives, including Ayman al-Zawahiri.¹⁰

In November 2013, the U.S. State Department said Boko Haram has links to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.¹¹ A 2011 Congressional report said members have been trained by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and that it also has links to al-Qaeda's affiliate in Somalia, al-Shabaab.¹²

⁸ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2014/05/11/boko-haram-s-bin-laden-connection.html>

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/27/boko-haram-nigeria-sharia-law>

¹⁰ <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/08/07/al-qaeda-conference-call-intercepted-by-u-s-officials-sparked-alerts.html>

¹¹ <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/finally-us-names-boko-haram-foreign-terrorist-organization>

¹² http://www.scribd.com/doc/74286783/Homeland-Security-Committee-Report-Boko-Haram-Emerging-Threat-to-the-U-S-Homeland?secret_password=1sq5dweo8gt9mkb9t5fj

BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

MAJOR ATTACKS

Boko Haram follows a doctrine of unrestrained warfare, making no distinction between non-combatants and combatants; civilians and soldier; females and males, or even Muslims and non-Muslims. Boko Haram has killed about 2,000 people since 2009.¹³



The leadership of Boko Haram believes disarmament is un-Islamic and is opposed to negotiated solutions. Spokesperson Abu Qaqa said in January 2012:

“We will consider negotiation only when we have brought the government to their knees...we will only put aside our arms — but we will not lay them down. You don’t put down your arms in Islam, you only put them aside.”¹⁴

Likewise, Shekau said in his April 2014 video taking credit for the abduction of 300 Nigerian schoolgirls:¹⁵

“If we meet infidels, if we meet those that become infidels, according to Allah, there is no any talk except hitting of the neck. I hope you, chosen people of Allah, are hearing. This is an instruction from Allah. It is not a distorted interpretation, it is from Allah himself.”

Some significant attacks carried out by Boko Haram include:

- **September 7, 2010:** Raid on a prison in Bauchi, Nigeria, freeing over 700 inmates.
- **June 2011:** Boko Haram’s first suicide bombing takes place at a police station in Abuja.
- **Christmas Eve 2010:** Bombings of churches during Christmas services kill 32 in Jos and Maidiguri.
- **August 26, 2011:** Suicide bombing of the United Nations headquarters in Abuja kills 23 people in one of the deadliest attacks in the U.N.’s history.
- **December 25, 2011:** Attacks on five churches across Nigeria in response to Christmas celebrations kill about 40 people. Attacks struck Madalla, Jos, Gadaka and Damaturu.
- **January 2012:** Attacks across Kano kill about 185 people.
- **April 2012:** Car bomb near a church in Kaduna holding an Easter service kills about 40.

¹³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22538888>

¹⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jan/27/boko-haram-nigeria-sharia-law>

¹⁵ <http://www.cknnigeria.com/2014/05/full-english-transcript-of-boko-haram.html>

BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

- **July 2012:** Suicide bombing of a mosque in Maiduguri that fails to kill the most senior imam in Borno but kills five Muslims.
- **February, 2013:** Kidnapping of seven French citizens in Cameroon. They are released two months later.
- **August 11, 2013:** Massacre of 44 Muslims during prayers at mosques in Konduga.
- **September 29, 2013:** Massacre of 44 teachers and male students at a college in Gujba.
- **November 2013:** Kidnapping of a French priest in Cameroon. He was released six weeks later.
- **February 15, 2014:** Storming of Christian village in Izghe, killing 106.
- **February 26, 2014:** Attack on a college in Buni Yadi kills 29 students.
- **April 14, 2014:** Kidnapping of about 276 schoolgirls in Chibok.
- **May 2014:** Massacre of about 300 people in Gamboru Ngala.



STRENGTH

There are no current and credible public estimates of Boko Haram's current membership. Shekau leads the group with an iron fist, killing rivals and not permitting other commanders to get publicity by appearing in his videos.¹⁶

In terms of organization, it operates as an insurgency/guerilla force, with units having between 300 and 500 fighters each. Boko Haram carries out acts of terrorism, but also tries to control territory and establish authority.¹⁷

The group has little public support in Nigeria. A 2013 Pew poll found that Boko Haram's support among Muslims in Nigeria has decreased 24% from 2010 to today, with only two percent expressing a favorable opinion of it. About 83% expressed an unfavorable opinion. The remaining 15% did not have an opinion on the group.¹⁸

¹⁶ <http://edition.cnn.com/2014/05/08/world/africa/boko-haram-leader-plan/>

¹⁷ <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/05/09/uk-nigeria-military-insight-idUKKBN0DP0PV20140509>

¹⁸ <http://www.clarionproject.org/analysis/new-poll-muslim-countries-finds-large-support-terrorists>

BOKO HARAM FACT SHEET

OTHER RESOURCES

Backgrounder: Boko Haram (Council on Foreign Relations)

<http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/boko-haram/p25739?>

Boko Haram: Growing Threat To The US Homeland (House of Representatives Committee on Homeland Security)

<http://homeland.house.gov/sites/homeland.house.gov/files/documents/09-13-13-Boko-Haram-Report.pdf>

Curbing Violence in Nigeria (II): The Boko Haram Insurgency (International Crisis Group)

<http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf>

Nigeria: Fleeing Boko Haram's Relentless Terror (International Displacement Monitoring Centre)

<http://www.internal-displacement.org/assets/publications/2014/201406-af-nigeria-boko-haram-brief-en.pdf>