

# Boko Haram as a threat to the stability of Nigeria

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## What are organized armed groups?

- A. Organized armed groups are the armed wing of a non-state party in a non-international armed conflict and may consist of:
- B. Dissident armed forces (e.g. defected parts of the state army) or Other armed groups that recruit their members primarily from the civilian population, with a sufficiently developed degree of organization possessed by state armed forces, in order to conduct hostilities in support of one side during the conflict<sup>1</sup>. - This group also belongs to Boko Haram!

## Who are Boko Haram?

The official name used by the supporters of this organization is Jamā'at Ahl as-Sunnah lid-Da'wah wa'l-Jihād (literal translation: Sunni group of people for Dawah (the act of converting to Islam) and Jihad)<sup>2</sup>. The name Boko Haram (literal translation from the Hausa language: Western education is forbidden) was given by the local population of the city of Maiduguri in Borno State, Nigeria<sup>3</sup>. Boko Haram is a radical Islamist organization formed in 2002 by Mohammad Yusuf, from 2009 after the death of Mohammad Yusuf, the organization was led by Abubakar Shekau until his death in 2021. The current leader of the organization is Abu Umaidata. The organization's main goals are to counter the influence of Western culture that they believe is adversely affecting Nigerian society and also to overthrow the Nigerian government in order to establish an Islamic State in Nigeria under Sharia law. On November 14, 2013, the US State Department declared Boko Haram a terrorist organization. The Global Terrorism Index named Boko Haram the second deadliest terrorist organization in 2016 with 5,784 confirmed deaths attributed to them<sup>4</sup>. According to the United Nations Human Rights Council, the methods they use to implement their goals are: killing civilians, kidnapping, torturing prisoners, sexual violence, using child soldiers, destroying and looting property. The organization's leader, Abubakar Shekau, pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2015 and Boko Haram became the Islamic State West African Province (ISWAP), but due to territorial conflicts between the two organizations and Abubakar Shekau's refusal to stop attacking Shia Muslim civilians, there was the collapse of the alliance and the beginning of hostilities. As a result of the new hostilities, Boko Haram split into three organizations: the

1) [https://casebook.icrc.org/a\\_to\\_z/glossary/armed-groups](https://casebook.icrc.org/a_to_z/glossary/armed-groups)

2) [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko\\_Haram](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Boko_Haram)

3) <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR308.pdf>

4) <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/nature-terrorism-changing/>

West African Province (under ISIS), Boko Haram (under Shekau) and Ansar, who are loyal to al-Qaeda. All three organizations are still active in Nigeria and neighboring countries such as Cameroon, Mali and Niger.

## Boko Haram under Mohammad Yusuf

In December 2003, during a dispute between local communities and Boko Haram over fishing rights in a local pond, the group clashed with the police. The members of this group overpowered the policemen and stole their weapons, which was followed by a siege of the mosque (located in the village of Kanama) to which they retreated. The resulting siege ended in an armed conflict between the police and members of the group, where most of the 70-member group were killed, including the mentor of Mohammad Yusuf, Mohammad Ali. After this event, Boko Haram attracted the attention of the Nigerian public because of the origins of many of the organization's members. They were young men who came from wealthy families from the northern states of Nigeria. They also attracted the attention of the US Embassy because of the nickname given to them by the local population of the village of Kaname: the Nigerian taliban. The US Embassy did not consider Boko Haram a major threat at that time. The rest of the surviving members moved to the city of Maiduguri where they built a mosque as the main gathering place for their supporters. The competent authorities did not prosecute them after the incident, so they continued to spread their influence in other states within Nigeria such as: Bauchi, Yobe and Niger. Observers have described Boko Haram as a "state within a state" with its own cabinet, religious police and a large farm used to feed its supporters. They gave charity contributions, food, accommodation. Their target group of people were refugees from the war in Chad and unemployed Nigerian youth. The source of the money and resources is still not proven, although there are theories that they were financed by Salafists from Saudi Arabia<sup>5</sup>.

On the eve of the 2007 Nigerian presidential elections, Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmoud Adam, a prominent member of the local community and a popular cleric in the city of Maiduguri, was assassinated in a mosque during his prayers. The assassination was ordered by Mohammad Yusuf because of the criticism and condemnation he received from the priest, so from that moment on it is considered that Boko Haram begins to act in a violent and bloody way<sup>6</sup>.

Demonstrations caused by supporters of Boko Haram lasted from July 25 to July 30, 2009. The reason for the demonstration was a raid in Bauchi state on one of their hideouts where 9 people were arrested and bomb-making materials and firearms were confiscated. The raid was followed by a series of reprisal attacks by Boko Haram supporters. They destroyed and burned churches, government buildings, schools and prisons. The consequence of these reprisals was conflict with the police and the army in which the number of victims was around 1000, and only in the city of Maiduguri, where the headquarters of Boko Haram was, over 700 victims (most of the victims were supporters of Boko Haram). The rebellions were suppressed by the arrest of the leader Mohammad Yusuf and later by his execution by the then government<sup>7</sup>.

## Boko Haram under Abubakar Shekau

After the execution of Mohammad Yusuf, Abubakar Shekau was chosen as the new leader of Boko Haram. In mid-2010, Boko Haram returns to the city of Maiduguri and begins a series of assassinations and violence. They started this campaign with a series of guerilla attacks on the police. Their most common method of attack was on members of the police, during which they approached police vehicles on motorbikes, then killed police officers and took their weapons. They also broke into the houses of people who cooperated with the authorities and killed them<sup>8</sup>. Abubakar Shekau was much more aggressive than the previous leader, and since his arrival at the top of the organization, a decade of terror began in the north of Nigeria, as well as in Cameroon, Chad and Niger. In September 2010, they attacked the federal prison in Bauchi state and on that occasion released 721 prisoners, of the total number of those released, 150 were associated with the organization. In June 2011, they planted a bomb in the UN building in the capital, Abuja, killing 21 and wounding 60<sup>9</sup>. A total of 40 civilians were killed during the attack on churches during the Christmas liturgies in 2011<sup>10</sup>, while in August 2013 they attacked a mosque

5) <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR308.pdf>

6) <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR308.pdf>

7) <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/afsp/article/view/330/330.html>

8) <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR308.pdf>

9) <https://www.channelstv.com/2021/07/24/twelve-years-of-terror-a-timeline-of-the-boko-haram-insurgency/>

10) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-16328940>

where they assumed that civilians who cooperated with the authorities were praying and killed 44 people<sup>11</sup>. In the town of Buni Yadi in Yobe State, they stormed a secondary school and killed 59 students<sup>12</sup>. In April 2014, 276 girls were kidnapped in the town of Chibok in Borno State, 4 years later in February they kidnapped another 110 girls in the town of Dapchi in Yobe State<sup>13</sup>. Out of a total of 276 girls, 57 managed to escape during the first hours of the kidnapping by jumping from the truck in which they were held captive. It was only in 2016 that members of the Nigerian army and police found the first kidnapped girl, in the period between 2016 and 2018, 103 girls were released as a result of negotiations between the authorities and the extremist group, most of the girls were married to Boko Haram fighters and they carried their children<sup>14</sup>. In May 2023, two more girls from the total number of kidnapped were found, Hauwa Maltha and Esther Marcus, who are now 26 years old<sup>15</sup>. The remaining 114 kidnapped girls are still in the hands of Boko Haram. In November 2020, they attacked an agricultural community in the city of Jere, the number of victims was 110<sup>16</sup>. Another mass kidnapping happened in December 2020 where more than 330 students were abducted from a high school in the city of Kankara<sup>17</sup>. This is by no means a complete list of all the attacks and crimes committed by the organization.

After a decade in power, Abubakar Shekau died in May 2021. The attack on his hideout was carried out by members of the West African Province of the Islamic State (ISWAP). At the end of the fight, Shekau surrendered. Allegedly, during the surrender, he was wearing a vest full of explosives, which he activated, killing himself and everyone near to him<sup>18</sup>.

## Boko Haram under Abu Umaima

On May 12, 2022, Boko Haram released a video of swearing allegiance to Abu Umaima<sup>19</sup>. Little is known about the new leader of Boko Haram, and it can be said of Boko Haram that they are now just a pale shadow of the former organization. They moved most of their operations to neighboring countries such as: Chad, Cameroon and Niger. Most of the commanders of the Boko Haram groups left the organization after the death of Abubakar Shekau and swore an oath to the leaders of the former branch of Boko Haram - the West African Province of the Islamic State (ISWAP).

## Conclusion

Since 2021, Boko Haram has lost its dominant role in Nigeria as the main security threat, that place has certainly been taken by ISWAP and Ansaru, which were once branches of Boko Haram. Although radical Islamist organizations change their name, their goal remains the same, the destabilizing factor they represent is not only important for the local region but for the entire world. With the influx of refugees from the Middle East in 2015, we could see the result of their actions. The humanitarian crisis in Nigeria caused by the actions of Boko Haram has resulted in around 35,000 deaths and 2.2 million internally displaced persons<sup>20</sup>. Unfortunately, the war in Ukraine has led to little media coverage of this case, similar to the conflict in northern Ethiopia in 2022. If the problem of extremist religious movements in Nigeria is not resolved soon, the European Union may see another wave of refugees, for which it is certainly not prepared.

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11) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-23676872>

12) <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-violence-idUSBREA1P10M20140226>

13) <https://www.reuters.com/article/instant-article/idINKCN1G90Q5>

14) <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-62324294>

15) <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/may/05/two-women-rescued-nine-years-after-chibok-schoolgirls-abduction>

16) <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/428662-110-people-killed-in-boko-haram-attack-on-borno-farming-community-un.html>

17) <https://apnews.com/article/science-nigeria-kidnapping-abubakar-shekau-cc437a469b56eb2c1842be8ae97cebff>

18) <https://humanglemedia.com/boko-haram-strongman-shekau-dead-as-iswap-fighters-capture-sambisa-forest/>

19) <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com/2022/05/13/boko-haram-video-reaffirming-loyalty-to-abu-umaimata-and-rejecting-iswap-may-12-2022/>

20) <https://www.globalr2p.org/countries/nigeria/>

