

'The disease is unbelief': Boko Haram's religious and political worldview

BY ALEX THURSTON

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Introduction

Boko Haram, a Nigerian jihadi group that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in March 2015,¹ has killed over 15,000 people in Nigeria and the surrounding countries of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon.² Boko Haram does not pose an existential threat to these states, but it has disrupted governance and caused a humanitarian emergency around Lake Chad. Its strident messages exacerbate intra-Muslim tensions and worsen Muslim-Christian relations in the region.³

The Nigerian state and its neighbors have responded to Boko Haram primarily with security campaigns. Marred by abuses against civilians and detainees,⁴ these crackdowns have fueled Boko Haram's politics of victimhood.

The group is resilient and adaptive. In early 2015, Nigerian and neighboring militaries dislodged the sect from Northeastern Nigerian towns it controlled; Boko Haram responded with a new wave of rural massacres and suicide bombings, including bombings in Chad's capital N'Djamena. Regional authorities lack long-term solutions for restoring peace and security, reflecting the tendency of many policymakers to treat Boko Haram solely as a security threat, while neglecting its political and religious dimensions. Despite the Nigerian government's December 2015 announcement that it had 'technically... won the war' against Boko Haram, attacks by the sect continue.⁵

Boko Haram's ideology is often described as comprising two stances: opposition to democracy and rejection of Western-style education. "Boko Haram" is a Hausa language nickname given by outsiders, meaning, "Western education is forbidden by Islam." The movement's spokesmen have sometimes accepted the nickname, but when they do, they insist that the phrase refers not just to schooling, but also to social and political ills that allegedly result from Western domination of Nigerian state and society.⁶

Yet the sect's theology and politics encompass more than hatred for Western influence. Its worldview fuses two broader ideas. First, there is a religious exclusivism that opposes all other value systems, including rival interpretations of Islam. This exclusivism demands that Muslims choose between Islam and a set of allegedly anti-Islamic practices: democracy, constitutionalism, alliances with non-Muslims, and Western-style education. Second, there is a politics of victimhood. Boko Haram claims that its violence responds to what it sees as a decades-long history of persecution against Muslims in Nigeria. Boko Haram sees state crackdowns on the sect as the latest manifestation of such persecution.

This paper argues that the combination of exclusivism and grievance has provided the ideological framework for Boko Haram's violence toward the Nigerian state, other Muslims, and Christians. The

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1. For more on the Islamic State see Cole Bunzel, "From Paper State to Caliphate: The Ideology of the Islamic State," The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, March 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/-/media/research/files/papers/2015/03/ideology-of-islamic-state-bunzel/the-ideology-of-the-islamic-state.pdf>.
 2. The Council on Foreign Relations' Nigeria Security Tracker keeps a tally of violent deaths in Nigeria by state, month, and perpetrator. The figures here are current as of January 2016. See: <http://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483>.
 3. Hakeem Onapajo and Abubakar Usman, "Fuelling the Flames: Boko Haram and Deteriorating Christian-Muslim Relations in Nigeria," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 35, no. 1 (2015): 106-122.
 4. Amnesty International, *Stars on Their Shoulders, Blood on Their Hands: War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military*, June 2015; and Human Rights Watch, *Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria*, October 2012.
 5. "Nigeria Boko Haram: Militants 'Technically' Defeated - Buhari," *BBC*, December 24, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35173618>.
 6. "Boko Haram Resurrects, Declares Total Jihad," *Vanguard*, August 14, 2009, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/08/boko-haram-ressurrects-declares-total-jihad/>.

paper builds on earlier analyses of Boko Haram's beliefs,⁷ murky origins,⁸ and social base.⁹ The paper draws on primary sources, such as the founder's Arabic manifesto *Hadhibi Aqidatuna wa-Manhaj Da'watina* (This Is Our Creed and the Method of Our Preaching), as well as propaganda videos and recorded sermons, primarily in Hausa and Arabic. These sources reveal striking rhetorical and ideological continuity among Boko Haram's leaders from 2002 to the present. Alongside other drivers of violence—including local politics, intra-Muslim rivalries, socioeconomic factors, and the brutality of the Nigerian government's response—the story that Boko Haram tells about itself offers insight into the movement's behavior.

The ideology espoused by Boko Haram's leaders may not permeate the movement, whose internal structure and degree of cohesion is unclear. Yet its leaders have consistently used religious rhetoric in an attempt to justify the sect's brutality, score-settling, and provocations. Such rhetoric, at the very least, provides a narrative that seeks to explain the campaign of violence: Boko Haram's leaders tell a provocative story about what it means to be Muslim in Nigeria, a story that seeks to activate fears that pious Muslims are losing grounds to the forces of immorality. The leaders' religious messages may, moreover, have greater appeal than is often assumed. Some of the sect's recruits are volunteers, both from Nigeria and from the surrounding region.¹⁰ Meanwhile,

Boko Haram is not alone in saying that Nigerian and regional Muslims must close ranks against perceived enemies, internal and external.¹¹ Unlike other movements in the region, however, Boko Haram's leaders have consistently used extremely narrow criteria to define who counts as a Muslim. Boko Haram foot soldiers are, whether for ideological, material, or personal reasons, willing to slaughter those whom the leaders have designated unbelievers.

After years of widespread pessimism about Nigeria's prospects, Nigerians have sought change. Boko Haram failed to disrupt the 2015 national and state elections. Under new President Muhammadu Buhari, a former military ruler and long-time opposition candidate, Nigeria has an opportunity to consolidate the military defeat of Boko Haram. Buhari has promised to strengthen regional cooperation, curb government corruption, and end military indiscipline. Yet attacks in summer and fall 2015 showed that the battle against Boko Haram is a long-term affair;¹² if the battle is to succeed, it must involve not just military successes but also a far-ranging effort to address socioeconomic problems, counteract narratives that the state is anti-Islamic, and constructively engage a rapidly transforming religious landscape in Northern Nigeria. Authorities should also create space for a political dialogue with elements of Boko Haram, starting by holding the killers of the sect's founder accountable.

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7. Anonymous, "The Popular Discourses of Salafi Radicalism and Salafi Counter-radicalism in Nigeria: A Case Study of Boko Haram," *Journal of Religion in Africa*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2012: 118-144; Ahmad Murtada, "Jama'at 'Boko Haram': Nash'atuha wa-Mabadi'uha wa-A'maluha fi Nayjiriya," *Qira'at Ifriqiyya*, November 13, 2012; Kyari Mohammed, "The Message and Methods of Boko Haram" in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, ed. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos (Ibadan, Nigeria: French Institute for Research in Africa, 2014), 9-32; and Abdulbasit Kassim, "Defining and Understanding the Religious Philosophy of Jihadi Salafism and the Ideology of Boko Haram," *Journal of Politics, Religion and Ideology*, published online September 1, 2015.
 8. Andrea Brigaglia, "Ja'far Mahmoud Adam, Mohammed Yusuf and Al-Muntada Islamic Trust: Reflections on the Genesis of the Boko Haram Phenomenon in Nigeria," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, vol. 11, 2012: 35-44, http://www.cci.uct.ac.za/user/publications/aria/download_issues/2012/Andrea%20Brigaglia.pdf; International Crisis Group, "The Boko Haram Insurgency," 3 April 2014, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/-/media/Files/africa/west-africa/nigeria/216-curbing-violence-in-nigeria-ii-the-boko-haram-insurgency.pdf>; and Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Nigeria's Interminable Insurgency? Addressing the Boko Haram Crisis," Chatham House, September 2014, http://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/field/field_document/20140901BokoHaramPerousedeMontclos_0.pdf.
 9. Adam Higazi, "Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram in North-East Nigeria" in *Collective Mobilisations in Africa*, ed. Kadya Tall, Marie-Emmanuelle Pommerolle, and Michel Cahen (Leiden: Brill, 2015): 305-358.
 10. "Fears in Cameroon of Boko Haram Recruitment," *IRIN News*, April 16, 2014, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99949/fears-in-cameroon-of-boko-haram-recruitment>.
 11. Murray Last, "The Search for Security in Muslim Northern Nigeria," *Africa*, vol. 78, no. 1 (February 2008): 41-63.
 12. Nathaniel Allen, Peter Lewis, and Hilary Matfess, "Down, Not Out: How to Fight Back Against Boko Haram's Newest Strategy," *Foreign Affairs*, June 18, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/nigeria/2015-06-18/down-not-out>.

Inadequate explanations of Boko Haram's rise

Alongside conspiracy theories that purport to explain Boko Haram,¹³ there are four common but inadequate treatments. First is the idea that Boko Haram is an inevitable result of poverty in Northern Nigeria. It is true that over 60% of Nigerians live on less than one dollar per day,¹⁴ and that Muslim-majority Northern Nigeria trails the heavily Christian South in infrastructural development and educational attainment. The North also has faster population growth. Yet economic deprivation alone cannot explain why violent movements grow in some places and not others, or why some movements develop particular worldviews. Analysis of Boko Haram should not discount demography, but neither should it make demography into destiny; demography is only one factor in a more complicated matrix of drivers of violence and dissent.

Second is the argument that Boko Haram responded to perceived political marginalization of the North and particularly the Northeast. Many Northerners were indeed offended by the 2011 electoral victory of President Goodluck Jonathan, a Southern Christian who originally ascended to the presidency on the death of President Umaru Yar'Adua, a Northern Muslim. Jonathan's re-election disrupted the ruling party's agreement to rotate the presidency between the South and the North every eight years. His victory sparked riots in Northern cities, causing over 800 deaths. Yet Boko Haram was formed before

Jonathan's victory and has continued to exist under Buhari, a Muslim. Meanwhile, Nigeria's "federal character" principle guarantees Northeastern Nigeria some representation at the national level. For example, Nigeria's constitution requires the federal cabinet to draw one minister from each of the republic's thirty-six states. Boko Haram is heavily Kanuri, a large ethnic group in the Northeast, but it does not use Kanuri nationalist rhetoric, nor has it sought greater representation for the Northeast within Nigeria's democracy—the system it rejects.

Third is the contention that the early Boko Haram was an extension of al-Qaida. This explanation suited Jonathan, who downplayed Boko Haram's political messages by characterizing the group as "an al-Qa'ida of West Africa."¹⁵ The early Boko Haram occasionally voiced support for al-Qaida,¹⁶ but its messages mostly focused on Nigerian politics.¹⁷ Some analysts believe that the sect received training from al-Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Somalia's al-Shabab, and that this training decisively influenced Boko Haram's capabilities.¹⁸ Credible reports suggested that Boko Haram fighters trained in Northern Mali during the jihadi takeover there in 2012–2013.¹⁹ But Boko Haram's actions do not entirely match the competencies and aims of its alleged sponsors. Some of its tactics are familiar from the repertoires of AQIM and al-Shabab, such as kidnapping Westerners and conducting suicide

13. These conspiracy theories are ably summarized and refuted in Abdul Raufu Mustapha, "Understanding Boko Haram" in *Sects & Social Disorder: Muslim Identities & Conflict in Northern Nigeria*, ed. Abdul Raufu Mustapha (London: James Currey, 2014): 147–198.

14. "Nigerians Living in Poverty Rise to Nearly 61%," *BBC News*, February 13, 2012, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-17015873>.

15. John Irish, "Nigerian President: Boko Haram is West Africa's Al Qaeda," *Reuters*, May 17, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-boko-haram-is-west-africas-al-qaeda-says-nigerian-president-2014-17>.

16. "Boko Haram Resurrects, Declares Total Jihad," *Vanguard*, August 14, 2009, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2009/08/boko-haram-ressurrects-declares-total-jihad/>.

17. Benjamin Eveslage, "Clarifying Boko Haram's Transnational Intentions, Using Content Analysis of Public Statements in 2012," *Perspectives on Terrorism*, vol. 7, no. 5 (October 2013): 47–76.

18. Adam Higazi, "Les origines et la transformation de l'insurrection de Boko Haram dans le Nord du Nigeria," *Politique Africaine*, no. 130/2, 2013: 137–164.

19. Drew Hinshaw, "Timbuktu Training Site Shows Terrorists' Reach," *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2013, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323926104578278030474477210>.

bombings. Other Boko Haram tactics appear self-generated, such as attacking cell phone towers and kidnapping women en masse. Its massacres of villagers, moreover, duplicate the very tactics that AQIM's predecessor organization was formed to oppose in the context of Algeria's mass violence in the 1990s. Much of Boko Haram's violence seems improvised, rather than directed from abroad. Boko Haram's eventual affiliation with the Islamic State may have represented a formal break with al-Qaida, but it is more likely that any relationship Boko Haram had with al-Qaida was patchy, informal, and marginal to its overall development.

Finally, there is the notion that Boko Haram is either the second coming of Nigeria's Maitatsine sect, or Maitatsine's indirect heir in terms of demography and root causes. The Cameroon-born preacher Muhammad Marwa (d. 1980), known as "Mai Tatsine (The One Who Curses)," rejected Western technology, promoted a "Quran-only" doctrine, and called himself a new prophet. His followers clashed with authorities in Kano in 1980, then resurfaced periodically over the next five years, only to be crushed at each turn.²⁰ Valuable comparisons can be made: Boko Haram has followed some patterns that characterized earlier movements of Muslim dissent like Maitatsine, such as strategic withdrawal from mainstream society.²¹ Yet Boko Haram's theology contradicts Maitatsine's; Nigerian Salafis denounce "Quran-only" Muslims as unbelievers. Claims that Boko Haram resembles Maitatsine demographically, particularly in its alleged reliance on students of Quran schools, rest on assumptions rather than evidence.²² What little is known about Boko Haram's social base indicates that Boko Haram has

recruited from diverse groups, including recently Islamized Northeastern populations and dropouts from secondary schools and universities.²³

In short, it is misleading to treat Boko Haram as a socioeconomic protest with an Islamic veneer, an ethnic revolt, a puppet of foreign jihadis, or a resurgence of an earlier religious movement. Rather, analysis should examine the interaction between structural factors, politics, and ideas in Northeastern Nigeria, and how this locality both reflected and diverged from broader global trends in militancy.

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20. Academic treatments of Maitatsine include Paul Lubeck, "Islamic Protest under Semi-Industrial Capitalism: 'Yan Tatsine Explained,'" *Africa*, vol. 55, no. 4, 1985: 369–389. For one comparison of Maitatsine and Boko Haram, see Abimbola Adesoji, "Between Maitatsine and Boko Haram: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Response of the Nigerian State," *Africa Today*, vol. 57, no. 4, 2011: 99–119.
21. Murray Last, "From Dissent to Dissidence: The Genesis & Development of Reformist Islamic Groups in Northern Nigeria" in *Sects & Social Disorder*, 18–53.
22. For a critique of the assumption that Quran school students form Boko Haram's social base, see Hannah Hoehner, "Traditional Quranic Students (Almajirai) in Northern Nigeria: Fair Game for Unfair Accusations?" in *Boko Haram*, ed. Pérouse de Montclos, 63–84.
23. Higazi, "Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram." A former spokesman to President Umaru Yar'Adua also suggests that Boko Haram drew primary and secondary school leavers, rather than Quranic students unexposed to Western-style education. Olusegun Adeniyi, *Power, Politics and Death: A Front-Row Account of Nigeria under the Late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua* (Lagos: Kachifo Limited, 2011).

Local and global roots

Boko Haram has roots in the religious landscape of Northern Nigeria and in intellectual currents connecting Northern Nigeria to the Middle East. Theologically, Boko Haram resembles other “Salafi-jihadi” movements around the world,²⁴ although Boko Haram was also shaped by local dynamics of preaching and politics. Prior to its reincarnation as the Islamic State’s West Africa Province (Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiya), its official name was Ahl al-Sunna li-l-Da‘wa wa-l-Jihad. Ahl al-Sunna, or “People of the Prophet’s Model,” is a synonym for “Sunni,” but for Boko Haram the phrase has special resonance: they consider themselves some of the only genuine representatives of Sunni Islam. The rest of the name indicates the group’s priorities: calling (*da‘wa*) people to its conception of Islam, and waging jihad.

Like other Salafis, Boko Haram claims to embody the authentic legacy of the early Muslim community (*al-salaf al-salih*, or “pious predecessors,” the phrase from which the term “Salafism” derives). Salafis treat foundational Islamic texts as manuals that apply literally to their own circumstances, and they reject several aspects of mainstream Sunni identity, such as adherence to recognized legal schools.

Like other Salafi-jihadis, Boko Haram asserts the right to declare Muslim leaders apostates, rebel against allegedly infidel states, and use force to impose the Salafi creed and a strict interpretation of Islamic law on civilians. Boko Haram aspires to replace the states around Lake Chad with a pure Islamic society. It views the United States, European countries, and Israel as evil powers that seek to destroy Islam. Its leaders have borrowed ideas

and postures from other Salafi-jihadis in order to give intellectual weight to their stances and paint their movement as part of a wider tradition, rather than a deviation from mainstream Salafism. Boko Haram’s leaders adapted global Salafi-jihadi ideas to the fragmented religious context of Northern Nigeria, including their own bitter rivalries with other Salafis.

Boko Haram represents a fringe of Northern Nigeria’s Salafi community. Statistics on Nigerian Muslims’ theological affiliations are unavailable, but Salafis are a minority. For two centuries, present-day Northern Nigeria has been a stronghold of Sufi orders, particularly the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya. Sufism permeates cities like Maiduguri and Kano. Since the 1960s, however, Nigerian Salafis have publicly questioned the orthodoxy of Sufism. Salafis attract audiences through their media presence and their networks of urban mosques and schools. They portray themselves as a vanguard of true Muslims within a wayward society.²⁵ Rejecting Boko Haram’s worldview and violence, many Nigerian Salafi leaders have denounced the sect—even as Boko Haram borrows their rhetorical styles and poaches among their followers.

Northern Nigerian Salafism originated with Abubakar Gumi (1924–1992). Gumi graduated from an elite, Arabic-language British colonial school for aspiring judges; after studying Islamic law in this setting, rather than in the classical style of tutorials with individual scholars, Gumi questioned whether classically trained Nigerian Muslim scholars properly understood Islam.²⁶ From 1962–1967, he served as Northern Nigeria’s senior Muslim judge. After 1966, when Gumi’s

24. Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Anatomy of the Salafi Movement,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, vol. 29, no. 3, 2006: 207–239; and Bernard Haykel, “On the Nature of Salafi Thought and Action” in *Global Salafism: Islam’s New Religious Movement*, ed. Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009): 33–57.

25. Alex Thurston, “The Salafi Ideal of Electronic Media as an Intellectual Meritocracy in Kano, Nigeria,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, forthcoming.

26. Abubakar Gumi with Ismaila Tsiga, *Where I Stand* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Spectrum Books, 1992).

political patron was killed in a military coup, Gumi shed his official roles and became an anti-Sufi polemicist.²⁷ In 1978, his followers founded Jama'at Izalat al-Bid'a wa-Iqamat al-Sunna (The Society for the Removal of Heretical Innovation and the Establishment of the Prophet's Model). Known as Izala, this mass organization spread anti-Sufism throughout Northern Nigeria,²⁸ including to Maiduguri, where Boko Haram originated. Izala's activism provoked bitter debates between Sufis and Salafis, with Sufis seeking to marginalize and constrain Salafism. Izala's current leaders vehemently oppose Boko Haram. Boko Haram is not an extension of Izala, but rather a result of fierce intra-Salafi competition for audiences.

Intra-Salafi competition accelerated amid generational change in the 1990s. Several important young Izala preachers like Ja'far Mahmud Adam (1961/2–2007) studied at Saudi Arabia's Islamic University of Medina in the 1990s. They returned home to find Izala divided after Gumi's death. Drawing on the prestige of their international education, the Medina graduates built a following outside Izala, teaching texts they had studied overseas.²⁹ They recruited young preachers into their network. One of them was Muhammad Yusuf, the founder of Boko Haram.

Born in Yobe State in 1970, Yusuf's early years are obscure. Accounts have variously labeled him a disgruntled Izala member, a one-time Shi'ite, and/or the charismatic leader of a student group

at the University of Maiduguri. He has been credited with graduate-level education and has been described as unschooled. Whatever the truth, by the early 2000s he was a leading protégé of Adam. Yusuf controlled several mosques in Maiduguri and preached throughout Northern Nigeria.³⁰ He cultivated notoriety, delivering a more strident message than his compatriots.

Yusuf found an audience partly because debates were growing about Islam's place in politics. In 1999, Nigeria returned to civilian rule after 33 years of military dictatorships and failed democratic experiments. Media outlets, private Islamic schools, and civic associations flourished. New voices entered the public arena, intensifying intra-Muslim discussions about democracy, Western values, and even jihadism.³¹ Salafis like Adam sometimes voiced admiration for figures like Osama bin Laden and Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi (1966–2006).³²

After the transition of 1999, Northern state governors implemented "full Sharia." New penal codes instituted corporal punishments mentioned in the Quran or derived from Islamic jurisprudence. Northern politicians responded to several factors: a desire for Northern self-assertion following the election of a Southern president;³³ resentment over previous political compromises on Sharia;³⁴ pressure from Muslim activists;³⁵ and fears among ordinary Northern Muslims that rapid social change was undermining the moral foundations of their society.³⁶

27. Abubakar Gumi, *Al-'Aqida al-Sahihah bi-Muwafaqat al-Shari'a* (Beirut: Dar al-'Arabiyya, 1972).

28. Roman Loimeier, *Islamic Reform and Political Change in Northern Nigeria* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997); Ousmane Kane, *Muslim Modernity in Postcolonial Nigeria: A Study of the Society for the Removal of Innovation and Reinstatement of Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 2003); and Ramzi Ben Amara, "The Izala Movement in Nigeria: Its Split, Relationship to Sufis and Perception of Shari'a Re-Implementation," Ph.D. dissertation, Bayreuth University, 2011.

29. Alex Thurston, "Nigeria's AhlulSunnah: A Preaching Network from Kano to Medina and Back" in *Shaping Global Islamic Discourses: The Role of Al-Azhar, Al-Medina, and Al-Mustafa*, ed. Masooda Bano and Keiko Sakurai (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press): 93–116.

30. Murtada, "Jama'at Boko Haram."

31. Muhammad Sani Umar, "Education and Islamic Trends in Northern Nigeria: 1970–1990s," *Africa Today*, vol. 48, no. 2, 2001: 127–150; and Tahir Gwarzo, "Activities of Islamic Civic Associations in the Northwest of Nigeria: With Particular Reference to Kano State," *Africa Spectrum*, vol. 38, no. 3, 2003: 289–318.

32. Anonymous, "Popular Discourses," 132–133.

33. William Miles, "Muslim Ethnopolitics and Presidential Elections in Nigeria," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, vol. 20, no. 2, 2000: 229–241.

34. Philip Ostien, "An Opportunity Missed by Nigeria's Christians: The 1976–78 Sharia Debate Revisited" in *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, ed. Benjamin Soares (Leiden: Brill, 2006): 221–255.

35. Paul Lubeck, "Nigeria: Mapping a Shari'a Restorationist Movement" in *Shari'a Politics: Islamic Law and Society in the Modern World*, ed. Robert Hefner (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011): 244–279.

36. Last, "The Search for Security."

Some governors embraced Sharia; others moved reluctantly.³⁷ In Borno State, where Maiduguri is the capital, Governor Mala Kachalla hesitated on Sharia implementation, which contributed to his defeat in the 2003 elections.³⁸ Intra-Muslim contestation over Sharia allowed Salafis to forge new political alliances—in Yusuf's case, a partnership with Borno's new Governor Ali Modu Sheriff. Radicals like Yusuf also argued that Sharia codes were insufficient, and that only a fully Islamic system could safeguard public morality. Yusuf served on Kachalla's Sharia implementation committee, but later expressed disgust with it.³⁹ Yusuf's disciple Buji Foi became Sheriff's Commissioner of Religious Affairs, but Yusuf and Sheriff soon fell out.

Yusuf's career began to zigzag. In 2003, breakaway followers established a base, perhaps a jihadi training camp, near Kannama, Yobe. The Kannama group, which the media labeled the "Nigerian Taliban," clashed with villagers and police and was crushed in early 2004. Fearing problems with authorities, "Yusuf fled to Saudi Arabia, ostensibly to study."⁴⁰ The following year, Sheriff's government invited Yusuf back to Maiduguri,⁴¹ reflecting the influence Yusuf still wielded. The next four years were the peak of his career: Yusuf reconciled with the Kannama group and "rose from a poor preacher to a wealthy cleric living in opulence and driving SUVs around the city, where he was hailed as a hero for his criticism of the government and his call for sharia law."⁴² Yet he was repeatedly detained in Abuja and elsewhere, which fed his emerging narrative of persecution.

In 2009, tensions between Yusuf and the authorities escalated into confrontations. In June, Boko Haram clashed with Sheriff's highway security unit, "Operation Flush." In a sermon, Yusuf denounced Sheriff and the Nigerian state.⁴³ In July, Boko Haram launched an uprising that touched five Northern states before authorities suppressed it. Over 1,100 people died, including Yusuf, who was killed while in police custody.⁴⁴

In the aftermath of the 2009 revolt, Boko Haram became an underground military organization with a new official leader, Abubakar Shekau. Born in the late 1960s or early 1970s, Shekau preached alongside Yusuf.⁴⁵ Shekau has translated Yusuf's theological positions into simple slogans that present audiences with an all-or-nothing choice between Islam and democracy. He has been the face of Boko Haram's violent campaign against the Nigerian state, Muslim and Christian civilians, and Nigeria's neighbors.

The amount of operational control Shekau has is debatable. Rumors constantly assert that he has died, that he is a figurehead, and/or that Boko Haram has fragmented. In 2012, a splinter group announced its formation, calling itself Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan (The Society of the Defenders of Muslims in the Lands of the Blacks, i.e. in Sahelian Africa).⁴⁶ Ansar al-Muslimin, however, has conducted only a handful of attacks and released only a few statements. Meanwhile, theories that Boko Haram comprises multiple factions remain speculative.

37. Franz Kogelmann, "The 'Shari'a Factor' in Nigeria's 2003 Elections" in *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, 256–274.

38. Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, "Boko Haram and Politics: From Insurgency to Terrorism" in *Boko Haram: Islamism, Politics, Security and the State in Nigeria*, 135–157.

39. Debate between Shaykh Isa 'Ali Pantami and Muhammad Yusuf, circa 2008: Muhammad Bakur, "muqabala maln Isaaali bauchi damaln muhammad yusuf maidugri akan karatun bokO haram 10," YouTube video, January 26, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFhYWeLWEyk>.

40. International Crisis Group, "The Boko Haram Insurgency," 10.

41. Human Rights Watch, "Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria," October 2012, 31, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria1012webwcover_0.pdf.

42. Adeniyi, *Power, Politics and Death*, 108.

43. Muhammad Yusuf, "Open Letter to the Federal Government of Nigeria," June 12, 2009: Muhammad Bakur, "waazin shekh muhannad yusuf 1," YouTube video, February 17, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f89PvcpWSRg>.

44. A video of the interrogation can be viewed here: Saharatv, "'Boko Haram' leader Mohammed Yusuf Interrogation before his execution by Nigerian security agents," YouTube video, August 3, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePpUvFTXY7w>.

45. A clip of Shekau preaching against Western-style education, circa 2008, can be found here: Sunnahization, "أبو بكر شيكو مالم," YouTube video, October 28, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eQY4GLtzLdU>.

46. Farouk Chothia, "Who Are Nigeria's Ansaru Islamists?" *BBC News*, March 11, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-21510767>. See also Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan, "Mithaq Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan," 2013, <https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2013/04/jamc481at-anelb9a3c481r-al-muslimc4abn-fi-bilc481d-al-sc5abdc481n-22the-charter-of-jamc481at-anelb9a3c481r-al-muslimc4abn-fi-bilc481d-al-sc5abdc481n22.pdf>; and "Mithaq Jama'at Ansar al-Muslimin fi Bilad al-Sudan," 2015, https://azelin.files.wordpress.com/2015/02/jamc481_at-anelb9a3c481r-al-muslimc4abn-fi-bilc481d-al-sc5abdc481n-22the-charter-of-jamc481_at-anelb9a3c481r-al-muslimc4abn-fi-bilc481d-al-sc5abdc481n22.pdf.

An exclusivist worldview

Boko Haram's members consider themselves arbiters of who is a true Muslim. Like other Salafis, Boko Haram rejects other approaches to Islam. Muhammad Yusuf regarded his mission as one of purification: "We call the Muslim community to correct its creed and its behaviors and its morals... and to give children a correct Islamic education, then to undertake jihad in the way of Allah."⁴⁷

Yusuf's Islamic education seems to have been informal, but he displayed familiarity with mainstream Salafi thought and its jihadi offshoots. Yusuf revered the Damascene theologian Ahmad Ibn Taymiyya (1263–1328), a central figure in Salafi thought today. Yusuf drew on contemporary Salafi-jihadi theorists such as the Palestinian-Jordanian Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi (b. 1959).⁴⁸ From al-Maqdisi, Yusuf borrowed a hardline conception of the doctrine of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'*. For Salafi-jihadis, *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* means exclusive loyalty (*al-wala'*) to those whom they consider true Muslims, and complete disavowal (*al-bara'*) of all others. For Yusuf, loyalty to Islam meant rejecting democracy and Western-style education:

What will make you a soldier of Allah first and foremost, you make a complete disavowal of every form of unbelief: the Constitution, the legislature...worshipping tombs, idols, whatever. You come to reject it in your speech and your body and your heart. Moreover, Allah and His Messenger and the believers, you love them in your speech and your body and your heart.⁴⁹

Yusuf combined *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* with other notions. He championed *izhar al-din* or "manifesting religion" through public action, and he held that *al-hukm bi-ghayr ma anzala Allah* or "ruling by other than what God revealed" is equivalent to polytheism.⁵⁰ Yusuf rejected the idea that Islam only exists "within the walls of the mosque."⁵¹ Personal piety alone was insufficient: Muslims needed to confront the fallen society surrounding them.

Yusuf's exclusivism found an audience in part because of a "fragmentation of sacred authority" in Northern Nigeria.⁵² Intra-Muslim tensions there have been growing markedly since the 1970s.⁵³ Part of what allowed Boko Haram to flourish in Maiduguri was the declining popular legitimacy of hereditary Muslim rulers, and a deterioration of their networks of surveillance and influence.⁵⁴ These rulers, often collectively called "emirs," are heirs to pre-colonial Muslim authorities like 'Uthman dan Fodio (1754–1817) in Sokoto, Muhammad al-Amin al-Kanemi (1776–1837) in Borno, and their lieutenants. The Sultan of Sokoto, the Shehu of Borno, and the Emir of Kano are the most prominent rulers today. During colonialism and after independence, the emirs preserved their positions, but some Northerners feel that emirs are now beholden to corrupt politicians. Ja'far Adam, Yusuf's estranged mentor, publicly argued that the emirs had squandered their prestige, and had failed to discharge their core duties of spreading Islam and preserving the Muslim community's moral order.⁵⁵

47. Abu Yusuf Muhammad bin Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna wa-Manhaj Da'watina* (likely Maiduguri, 2008 or 2009), 5–6.

48. On al-Maqdisi, see Joas Wagemakers, *A Quietist Jihadi: The Ideology and Influence of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

49. Recording of commentary by Muhammad Yusuf on *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, undated (likely 2008 or 2009): Sunnahization, "LITTAFIN HAAZIHI AQEEDATUNA_010a.wmv," YouTube video, December 7, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JWfWa2rfsKw&index=2&list=UUdXgmSgdkq3HlwFnZcYuweA>.

50. On Boko Haram's use of this last notion, see Kassim, "Defining and Understanding."

51. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 73.

52. On this broader trend in contemporary Muslim societies, see Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

53. Trends discussed in Kane, *Muslim Modernity*.

54. Last, "Search for Security"; Alhaji Mahmood Yakubu, *An Aristocracy in Political Crisis: The End of Indirect Rule and the Emergence of Party Politics in the Emirates of Northern Nigeria* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 1996).

55. Ja'far Mahmud Adam, "Siyasa a Nigeria" (recorded lecture), 2003.

Boko Haram has targeted hereditary rulers, including in unsuccessful assassination attempts against the Shehu of Borno⁵⁶ and the Emir of Kano.⁵⁷ In May 2014, Boko Haram killed the Emir of Gwoza,⁵⁸ the town where it founded a "state" three months later. Shekau has conducted a war of words with Kano's Emir Muhammadu Sanusi II. When Sanusi urged Nigerians to arm themselves against Boko Haram, Shekau reacted furiously, opposing what he called Sanusi's "religion of democracy" to Boko Haram's alleged devotion to God.⁵⁹ Such rhetoric cast the emir as an infidel.

Like other Nigerian Salafis, Boko Haram denounces Sufism. Sufi orders, hierarchical organizations that initiate Muslims into techniques and traditions of mysticism, remain the dominant type of Muslim association in Northern Nigeria. Salafis often view Sufis as blameworthy innovators within Islam, and view Sufi leaders as charlatans. Yusuf said that Sufis worshipped their shaykhs instead of God, and privileged asceticism over jihad.⁶⁰ Boko Haram has targeted several Sufi leaders, including Dahiru Bauchi (b. 1929), a prominent Tijani who had tried to mediate between Boko Haram and the state,⁶¹ and Adam al-Nafati of Bauchi State.⁶²

In keeping with its exclusivism, Boko Haram commits violence against rival Salafis, whom the sect sees as dangerous competitors for audiences. Yusuf presented himself as a mainline Salafi, depicting his positions as identical to those of Saudi Arabia's re-

ligious establishment. Yet it was on these grounds that other Nigerian Salafis challenged him. As Boko Haram gained notoriety after the Kannama clashes, fellow Salafis criticized Yusuf, first in private and then publicly. These Salafis, many of whom held university degrees, argued that Yusuf's opposition to Western-style education would retard Northern Muslims' economic and political development.⁶³ Adam painted Boko Haram as agents of outside interests, including Southern Nigerian Christians, the West, and foreign jihadis.⁶⁴ These accusations reinforced Boko Haram's sense of exclusivism, making Yusuf and his core followers feel that they could no longer trust Salafis who defended Western-style education or government service; Yusuf, and later Shekau, came to anathematize and target Salafis who opposed Boko Haram. The sect was likely responsible for Adam's 2007 murder. Boko Haram has assassinated other Salafi critics, including Muhammad Awwal Adam "Albani" in 2014. When claiming that murder, Shekau also threatened Izala's leaders,⁶⁵ showing how sensitive Boko Haram remains to Salafis' criticisms.

Unlike Yusuf, Shekau rarely expounds his doctrine, but he invokes Salafi theology as a basis for violent exclusivism. In the video "This Is Our Creed," Shekau presented a rudimentary Salafism:

Our creed is the creed of our Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace. And our

56. "Shehu of Borno, Deputy Governor Escape Death in Suicide Bomb Blast," *AFP*, July 13, 2012. <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/shehu-of-borno-dep-gov-escape-death-in-suicide-bomb-blast/119979/>.

57. Boko Haram has attempted to kill both Emir Ado Bayero (1930–2014, ruled 1963–2014) and Emir Muhammadu Sanusi II (b. 1961, took office 2014). See Will Ross, "Nigeria: Kano Reels after Emir Attack," *BBC News*, February 7, 2013; and "Nigeria Unrest: Kano Mosque Attack Kills Dozens," *BBC News*, November 28, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-30250950>.

58. Lanre Odo and Kwasi Kpodo, "Suspected Boko Haram Gunmen Kill Emir, Policemen in Nigeria," *Reuters*, May 30, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/30/us-nigeria-boko-haram-kidnapping-idUSKBN0EA16220140530>.

59. Abubakar Shekau, "Risala ila al-Za'im al-Musamma bi-Malik Kano," December 2014, http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=af5_1418909889.

60. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 140.

61. Andrea Brigaglia, "Note on Shaykh Dahiru Usman Bauchi and the July 2014 Kaduna Bombing," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa*, no. 12/1, 2013–2014: 39–42.

62. "Boko Haram Kills Scores, Islamic Cleric in Nafada," *The Sun*, November 5, 2014, <http://sunnewsonline.com/new/boko-haram-kills-scores-islamic-cleric-in-nafada/>.

63. Anonymous, "Popular Discourses."

64. Ja'far Adam, "Me Ya Sa Suke Cewa Boko Haramun Ne?" undated (likely 2005–2007): Ibrahim Gwayo, "1-Me Yasa suke cewa boko Haram ne?-Sheikh Ja'afar Mahmud Adam da khabir Gombe.wmv," YouTube video, July 26, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkNDO0e2Jf8>; "Fadakarwa Game da Halalcin Boko," undated (likely 2005–2007): A M Bashir Shuwa, "FADAKARWA GAME DA HALALCIN BOKO DAGA MARIGAYI SHEIKH JA'AFAR," YouTube video, November 22, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hiM1ZUhmLAU>.

65. Alex Thurston, "Nigeria's Mainstream Salafis between Boko Haram and the State," *Islamic Africa*, vol. 6, no. 1 (July 2015): 109–134; Salisu Bala, "Salafi Targets for 'Boko Haram': The Murder of Shaykh Muhammad Auwal Adam 'Albani' Zaria (d. 2014)," *Annual Review of Islam in Africa* 12/1 (2013–2014): 31–38.

approach is the approach of our Messenger, may God bless him and grant him peace...And his creed is the oneness of God, may He be glorified and exalted.

Then Shekau turned to the issue of *takfir*, or declaring other Muslims unbelievers. “The excuse of ignorance is not taken into consideration for the greater polytheism,” he said, claiming the right to kill other Muslims even if they supported democracy, constitutionalism, or Western-style education without realizing that Boko Haram proscribed these systems.⁶⁶

Shekau’s polemics extend Yusuf’s reading of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*, especially as Shekau increasingly castigates the West. In January 2015, responding to the French newspaper *Charlie Hebdo*’s cartoons of the Prophet, Shekau said:

Anyone who insults our Prophet is an unbeliever. Anyone who doubts that is an unbeliever. Anyone who boasts of this is an unbeliever. Oh people of the world, repent to Allah Most High and if not, you will see what you see...Our Lord, may He be glorified and exalted, has said, “No one rules but God” (Qur’an 12:40). And He has said, “Whoever does not rule by what God has revealed, they are the unbelievers” (5:44). And He has said, may He be glorified and exalted, “O you who believe, do not take the Jews and the Christians as allies (*awliya*). They are allies of one another. And whoever is an ally to them among you, then indeed, he is one of them” (5:51). He is one of them.⁶⁷

Loyalty to Islam here does not just apply to the realm of worship: at stake also is an understanding of politics that, for Boko Haram, is inseparable from what it means to be authentically Muslim.

66. Abubakar Shekau, “Wannan Ne Akidarmu,” likely 2015, http://www.liveleak.com/view?i=d4b_1421362369.

67. Abubakar Shekau, “Message to the World on Baga,” January 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/01/21/new-video-message-from-boko-%E1%B8%A5arams-jamaat-ahl-al-sunnah-li-dawah-wa-l-jihad-imam-abu-bakr-shekau-message-to-the-world-on-baga/>.

Opposing the political system

Boko Haram's best-known stance is its rejection of Western-style schooling. Yet the concept "Boko Haram" encompasses a broader critique of Nigerian society, targeting the perceived fruits of such schools. Boko Haram is not alone in resenting the highly educated Nigerian elites who have failed to deliver prosperity to the majority of Nigerians. Many Nigerians decry widespread corruption in government.

Some Muslims in the North, where classical Quranic and Islamic education is a powerful social force, feel ambivalence toward Western-style institutions of learning. On the one hand, secondary and tertiary degrees are respected credentials, and Northerners take pride in their region's universities and colleges. On the other hand, some Northern Muslims believe Western-style schools fail to inculcate Islamic values. Boko Haram represents an extreme manifestation of this latter attitude. It rejects compromises such as "Islamiyya" schools that blend government curricula with religious instruction.

Yusuf objected to the content and effects of Western-style education. Ideas like Darwinism, he said, contradicted the Quran. Schools led Muslim children to adopt the mannerisms of Jews and Christians. Children of different genders interacted at school, promoting "fornication, lesbianism, homosexuality, and other [corruptions]."⁶⁸ The "Christianizing" schools of British colonialism, he stated, were no different than postcolonial government schools, but the prospect of material gain blinded Muslims to the truth: "Because of love for this world, many people's hearts have been saturated with love of these schools, until they do not see in them that which contradicts [Islam's] law."⁶⁹ For Yusuf, the credentials conferred by Western-style schools were useless to genuine Muslims: "Our move-

ment rejects work under any government that rules by something other than what God has revealed."⁷⁰ Yusuf's beliefs on intra-Muslim solidarity, the rejection of democracy, and the rejection of Western-style education formed a single package.

Yusuf's Islamist vision was extreme in the Northern Nigerian context. In diverse ways, most Northern Muslims believe that Islam provides policymaking frameworks that should shape public life. Yet few prominent Nigerians call for an Islamic state. Sharia implementation was led by politicians who belonged to major, non-Islamist political parties, and the effort drew support from diverse constituencies, including Sufis, Salafis, and unaffiliated Muslims. Many proponents of Sharia considered it compatible with a federal, democratic system⁷¹—they called for elected politicians to enforce Islamic law, rather than for a theocracy in which unelected clerics would rule. Muslim activists in 21st century Nigeria have often contended that "Islamic" courts, banks, state-subsidized pilgrimages, and other institutions can co-exist alongside secular institutions at both the state and the federal level. For their part, non-jihadi Salafis sometimes hold government appointments or offer public "advice" to politicians, indicating their basic acceptance of electoral politics and a secular framework for government.

For Boko Haram, politics entails total commitment to the idea of Islam as a societal blueprint. Yusuf wrote, "The shari'a of Islam is a perfect and complete shari'a...It is appropriate in every time and place, globally."⁷² He lamented,

We see a state in which Muslims are living, but they refuse the Islamic shari'a in its totality, and put in its place the system of democracy. And

68. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 93.

69. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 79.

70. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 108.

71. Brandon Kendhammer, "The Sharia Controversy in Northern Nigeria and the Politics of Islamic Law in New and Uncertain Democracies," *Comparative Politics*, vol. 45, no. 3 (April 2013): 291-311.

72. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 143.

we see people with the name *'ulama'* [scholars] calling for democracy and defending it, and making ugly refutations against the people who call others to follow the law of Allah.⁷³

Yusuf argued that democracy positions the people as an authority in rivalry with God. He warned that majority rule allows for agreement on an error, whereas Islam demands obedience to the Quran and the Sunna. From democracy, he continued, multiple evils flowed, all of them cloaked as freedom: for example, “freedom of belief” allowed for apostasy from Islam.⁷⁴ It was insufficient to condemn democracy: the true Muslim had to oppose it. Democracy “is the school of the infidels: following it, having dealings with it, or using its system is unbelief.”⁷⁵

Like Yusuf, Shekau rejects an entire package of ideas. In a 2012 video, he challenged President Jonathan’s depiction of Boko Haram as a “cancer” and presented a rival epidemiological metaphor:

The disease is unbelief, and as Allah says, “Disorder is worse than killing” (Qur’an 2:191)... Everyone knows democracy is unbelief, and everyone knows the Constitution is unbelief, and everyone knows that there are things Allah has forbidden in the Qur’an, and that are forbidden in countless hadiths of the Prophet, that are going on in Western schools... We ourselves haven’t forbidden anything, we haven’t told the Muslim community to abandon anything, we simply stand on the path of truth.⁷⁶

For Shekau, Western-style education was sinful not just for its intellectual content, but for its political impact. In one message, Shekau contrasted his faith in God with the National Pledge recited in government schools: “You are worshipping the nation,”

he told listeners.⁷⁷ For Shekau, the “disorder” the Quran condemns has come in the form of a heretical system. The only suitable response is to violently oppose that system: “Know, people of Nigeria and other places, a person is not a Muslim unless he disavows democracy and other forms of polytheistic unbelief (shirk).”⁷⁸

73. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 156.

74. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 64–65.

75. Yusuf, *Hadhihi 'Aqidatuna*, 63.

76. Abubakar Shekau, “Message to President Jonathan,” January 2012: NaijaTV, “Boko Haram leader “Imam Abubakar Shekau” Message to President Jonathan 1,” YouTube video, January 11, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umkj50SUzck>.

77. Boko Haram, “Min dunihi fa-Kiduni thumma La Tanzurun,” May 5, 2014: Saharatv, “Boko Haram Leader Shekau Releases Video On Abduction of Chibok Girls,” YouTube video, May 5, 2014 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wrfWS_vLOD4.

78. Saharatv: “VIDEO: Boko Haram Declares A New Caliphate In NorthEastern Nigeria,” YouTube video, August 24, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rl4Igd--nKg>.

Grievance and reprisal

Boko Haram presents itself as the victim of state aggression and the voice for a larger, and aggrieved, Muslim constituency. In his June 2009 “Open Letter to the Federal Government of Nigeria,” a lecture delivered shortly before Boko Haram’s uprising, Yusuf linked his complaints against the Borno State government to what he saw as a pattern of anti-Muslim violence in Nigeria. He mentioned famous Muslim-Christian clashes: the 1987 riots in Kafanchan, Kaduna State; the 1992 killings in Zangon-Kataf, Kaduna; and cyclical violence in Plateau State, dating to 1994.⁷⁹ Yusuf concluded: “The government of Nigeria has not been built to do justice...It has been built to attack Islam and kill Muslims.”⁸⁰

As with opposing democracy, it was not enough to criticize the state’s persecution of Muslims. *Al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* and *izhar al-din* demanded an aggressive defense of Islam, because Islam’s enemies were on the move:

The believer will not leave his faith. Likewise, the infidel and the hypocrite will not give up his polytheism and his craftiness. Allah Most High has said, “Many of the People of the Book wish to turn you back to unbelief after you have believed” (Qur’an 2:109)...Meaning if you don’t follow their goals, you cannot be reconciled with them. There’s nothing that can allow you to get along with the infidel and the hypocrite unless you become exactly like them.⁸¹

Yusuf sought to activate Muslims’ feelings that different groups—Christians, the state, the West—had

humiliated Muslims inside Nigeria and around the world. Yusuf warned his followers that the sect’s enemies would not rest until they had crushed the group and stolen its women.

Yusuf’s death intensified his successors’ sense that the state systematically victimized Muslims. Shekau fit the 2009 crackdown into a larger narrative:

Everyone knows the way in which our leader was killed. Everyone knows the kind of evil assault that was brought against our community. Beyond us, everyone knows the kind of evil that has been brought against the Muslim community of this country periodically: incidents such as Zangon Kataf... These are the things that have happened without end.⁸²

For Shekau, Boko Haram was the victim: “They’re fighting us for no reason, because we’ve said we’ll practice our religion, we will support our religion and stand on what God has said.”⁸³

When it re-emerged in 2010, Boko Haram was bent on challenging the Nigerian state and local politicians for control of Northeastern Nigeria. Starting with a prison break in September 2010, Boko Haram waged a guerrilla campaign in the Northeast, assassinating politicians and policemen, robbing banks, raiding police stations, and breaking into prisons. Its violence rendered Maiduguri a city of curfews and bombings, crippling commerce there.

79. For background, see Human Rights Watch, “‘Leave Everything to God’: Accountability for Inter-Communal Violence in Plateau and Kaduna States, Nigeria,” December 2013, http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/nigeria1213_ForUpload.pdf; and Toyin Falola, *Violence in Nigeria: The Crisis of Religious Politics and Secular Ideologies* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2001).

80. Muhammad Yusuf, “Open Letter to the Federal Government of Nigeria,” June 12, 2009; Muhammad Bakur, “waazin shekh muhannad yusuf 1,” YouTube video, February 17, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f89PvcvWSRg>.

81. Yusuf, “Open Letter.”

82. Abubakar Shekau, “Message to President Jonathan,” January 2012; NaijaTV, “Boko Haram leader ‘Imam Abubakar Shekau’ Message to President Jonathan 1,” YouTube video, January 11, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=umkj50SUzck>.

83. Abubakar Shekau, “Sako Zuwa Ga Duniya,” September 2012; Abba Ibrahim, “Sako Zuwa Ga Duniya (A Message to The World)!” YouTube video, September 30, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=txUJCOKTIuk&sns=em>.

Convinced that the state and Christians collaborate to target Nigerian Muslims, Boko Haram killed Christians and sought to enflame Muslim-Christian tensions. In 2011–2012, Boko Haram repeatedly claimed responsibility for bombings of churches, including in sites of recurring Muslim-Christian conflict such as Kaduna and Plateau.⁸⁴ After one bombing in Plateau, Boko Haram's spokesman told journalists, "Before, Christians were killing Muslims, helped by the government, so we have decided that we will continue to hunt down government agents wherever they are."⁸⁵ Boko Haram soon demanded that all Christians leave Northern Nigeria.

Boko Haram's desire for vengeance shaped its behavior during the 2011 election campaign. The sect settled local scores, assassinating Borno politicians close to outgoing Governor Sheriff. It was only after the elections that Boko Haram's attention turned to the national stage. Nigerian conspiracy theorists have charged that dissatisfied Northern elites sponsored Boko Haram in order to make the North ungovernable and derail Jonathan's presidency. The truth is likely simpler: as it gained strength in 2011, and as it faced crackdowns by the military, Boko Haram's anger toward the federal government increased along with its capacity to strike. Boko Haram did not parlay Northern dissatisfaction with Jonathan into broad-based recruitment. If Boko Haram nursed personal grievances against Jonathan, it was due to the escalating military campaign in the Northeast, which involved the deployment of the Nigerian military's Joint Task Force in 2011.

Boko Haram signaled its widening range of targets by conducting two suicide bombings in Abuja in summer 2011, striking the National Police Force head-

quarters in June and the United Nations building in August. Its attacks expanded into Northwestern cities like Kano, where a raid killed nearly 200 people in early 2012. Yet even with these new areas of operations, Boko Haram remained a parochial Northeastern force with limited capacity to mount attacks elsewhere in the North. Tellingly, Boko Haram has only staged one attack, and a minor one at that, in Nigeria's commercial hub Lagos, which sits in the far Southwest. Boko Haram has not attacked the oil-producing Niger Delta. It is not an ever-expanding juggernaut.

As state crackdowns intensified with the imposition of a state of emergency in Northeastern states from May 2013 to November 2014, Boko Haram struck symbols of state repression in the Northeast. In March 2014, it overran Giwa Barracks, a prison where authorities had detained and tortured suspected militants. Shekau bragged, "We freed over 2,000 brothers...one of them, at the gate of the barracks, took a gun and started fighting...the world has changed."⁸⁶ In January 2015, Boko Haram slaughtered as many as 2,000 residents in Baga, a garrison town. Nearly two years before, Nigerian soldiers had massacred nearly 200 civilians and razed some 2,000 homes there.⁸⁷ In his "Message to the World on Baga," Shekau flaunted arms Boko Haram had seized and said, "Jonathan, you're in trouble. Governors of Nigeria, you're in trouble. These materials were obtained in Baga."⁸⁸ Boko Haram has striven not just to defeat but to humiliate the Nigerian state.

Boko Haram's April 2014 kidnapping of 276 schoolgirls in Chibok, Borno also followed a logic of retaliation: it fulfilled Shekau's threat to avenge Nigerian authorities' detentions of sect members' female relatives.⁸⁹ In 2012, Shekau had said:

84. "Boko Haram Claims Responsibility for Nigeria Attacks," *The Telegraph*, December 25, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/nigeria/8977493/Boko-Haram-claims-responsibility-for-Nigeria-attacks.html>; and "Boko Haram Claims Responsibility for Nigeria Church Bombings," *CNN*, June 18, 2012, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/06/18/world/africa/nigeria-church-bombings/>.

85. Buhari Bello, "Nigeria's Boko Haram Claims Deadly Plateau Attacks," *Reuters*, July 10, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/10/us-nigeria-bokoharam-idUSBRE8690NO20120710>.

86. Abubakar Shekau, "Ma'rakat Maiduguri 2," March 2014: TRAC Nigeria, "Boko Haram Leader, Abubakar Shekau Claims Responsibility on Barracks Attack," YouTube video, April 19, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pba8uvuf9Is>.

87. Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Massive Destruction, Deaths from Military Raid," May 1, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/05/01/nigeria-massive-destruction-deaths-military-raid>.

88. Shekau, "Message to the World on Baga."

89. Elizabeth Pearson and Jacob Zenn, "How Nigerian Police Also Detained Women and Children as a Weapon of War," *The Guardian*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/06/how-nigerian-police-also-detained-women-and-children-as-weapon-of-war>.

They're holding our brothers in prison. They've arrested them, tortured them, and subjected them to various forms of abuse. I'm not just talking about our religious leader—now, they've started to detain our women... Since you are seizing our women, you wait and see what will happen to your women.⁹⁰

Chibok was part of a pattern of abductions of women in the Northeast.⁹¹ It was also part of a pattern of attacks on schools, where boys were often killed outright.⁹²

The Chibok kidnapping had symbolic resonance, which Shekau exploited. For both jihadis and Western governments, young women—their schooling and their bodies—symbolize visions of moral order. After Chibok, Shekau infamously proclaimed, “I seized your young women. I will sell them in the market.” Seeking to internationalize the incident, he taunted Barack Obama and other world leaders. Reinforcing his personal connection to the incident, he mocked the bounty on his own head, and promised to sell Jonathan and Obama as slaves.⁹³

Boko Haram was somewhat more attuned to the national electoral calendar in 2015 than in 2011, but its behavior still correlated most closely with events that directly affected it. Shekau's February 2015 “Message to the Leaders of the Disbelievers” made headlines for his alleged threats against the elections, but most of his diatribe threatened Nigerian President Mahamadou Issoufou and Chadian President Idriss Deby, whose campaign to retake Boko Haram's territory was already in full swing.⁹⁴ Boko Haram remained focused on seeking revenge against its enemies, a focus that informed its campaign of rural brutality and skeletal state-building in 2014–2015.

90. Shekau, “Sako Zuwa Ga Duniya.”

91. Human Rights Watch, “Nigeria: Boko Haram Abducts Women, Recruits Children,” November 29, 2013, <http://www.hrw.org/news/2013/11/29/nigeria-boko-haram-abducts-women-recruits-children>.

92. “Students Massacred in Nigeria Attack,” *Al Jazeera*, September 30, 2013, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/africa/2013/09/gunmen-storm-nigerian-college-201392910646471222.html>; “Nigeria School Raid in Yobe State Leaves 29 Dead,” *BBC News*, February 25, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-26338041>.

93. Boko Haram, “Min dunihi Fa-Kiduni.”

94. Boko Haram, “Message to the Leaders of the Disbelievers.”

Implementing exclusivism through brutality

Most of Boko Haram's victims have been Muslims. Boko Haram's combination of an exclusivist Muslim identity and a politics of victimhood has fueled its brutality against civilians in the Lake Chad region, particularly since 2013. That year, Boko Haram lost ground in Maiduguri to a government-backed vigilante group, the Civilian Joint Task Force or C-JTF. (The Joint Task Force was the Nigerian security force in the Northeast, though it has since been rebranded and supplemented with other units). Boko Haram strategically retreated into the countryside of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe.

Shekau claimed to be imitating the Prophet by massacring "unbelievers" in Northeastern communities.⁹⁵ Boko Haram harassed C-JTF strongholds such as Benisheik, Borno, killing over 140 residents there in September 2013.⁹⁶ By the time Boko Haram attacked Giwa Barracks in March 2014, Shekau identified the C-JTF as a central enemy: "Whether you run, or you take up arms, or you put on a soldier's uniform, or you put on a police uniform, or you put on a turban... What I am saying now, is that I have begun to topple you."⁹⁷ When the C-JTF assisted Nigerian security forces in executing some 600 recaptured detainees after the Giwa attack, they reinforced the sense that total war gripped Northeastern Nigeria.⁹⁸

In July 2014, the focus of Boko Haram's brutality shifted. Intensifying its bid to neutralize the C-JTF,⁹⁹ and exploiting its increasing seizures of

Nigerian military equipment, Boko Haram began incorporating towns into a would-be state, starting with Damboa, Borno. The sect may have exercised de facto sway over parts of Borno prior to 2014, but its actions that year reflected a more systematic bid for territorial control. In August, Shekau announced the establishment of a "state among the states of Islam" in Gwoza, Borno.¹⁰⁰ He harangued the C-JTF, bragging that in Damboa, a vigilante stronghold, "our brothers came and they're living in your houses."¹⁰¹ Gwoza was a convenient headquarters: Yusuf had enjoyed a following among immigrants from Gwoza to Maiduguri, and Boko Haram retained a presence around Gwoza after his death.¹⁰² To its "state," Boko Haram soon added considerable territory in Borno and Adamawa, with some holdings in Yobe. The state included sizeable cities, such as Mubi, headquarters of Adamawa's North senatorial district.

Shekau averred, "Our state is ruled by the Book of God; our state establishes the Sunna of our Prophet, Muhammad."¹⁰³ Yet he showed little interest in implementing the kind of law and order that has won other African jihadis limited popularity; when al-Shabab ruled Southern Somalia from roughly 2009–2012 and when jihadis controlled Northern Mali in 2012–2013, those groups made some effort to implement Sharia. In contrast, Shekau focused on war, stating, "There is nothing between us and the despots of Nigeria except jihad."¹⁰⁴ Propaganda from Boko Haram-controlled territory featured

95. "Boko Haram Declares a New Caliphate."

96. Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: Boko Haram Abducts Women, Recruits Children."

97. Shekau, "Ma'rakat Maiduguri 2."

98. Amnesty International, "More than 1,500 Killed in Armed Conflict in North-Eastern Nigeria in Early 2014," March 2014, https://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/nigeria__more_than_1500_killed_in_armed_conflict_0.pdf.

99. Drew Hinshaw, "Civilian Vigilante Effort against Boko Haram Backfires in Nigeria," *Wall Street Journal*, August 4, 2014, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/civilian-vigilante-effort-against-boko-haram-backfires-in-nigeria-1407108799>.

100. "Boko Haram Declares a New Caliphate."

101. "Boko Haram Declares a New Caliphate."

102. Higazi, "Mobilisation into and against Boko Haram," 41–46.

103. "Boko Haram Declares a New Caliphate."

104. Saharatv, "Boko Haram Militants Display Control Of Captured Towns in Northeastern Nigeria," YouTube video, November 10, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7dkdFaVrClS>.

battle scenes and seized military equipment,¹⁰⁵ but showed no civil institutions. Perhaps, harried by several militaries, Boko Haram could not consolidate governance. Yet it is striking that the group made little effort to institutionalize Islamic courts and schools, or to distribute humanitarian relief. Hundreds of thousands of civilians fled.

Shekau declared that Boko Haram's state was no longer part of Nigeria.¹⁰⁶ Creating a Salafi-jihadi enclave meant expunging Christianity. Boko Haram sought to kill or forcibly convert Christians, and the sect destroyed churches and seminaries.¹⁰⁷ Boko Haram made rudimentary attempts to teach its ideology. One young Christian woman captured by Boko Haram in Adamawa was forcibly converted to Islam, and then made to spend her days praying and learning Quranic verses.¹⁰⁸ In one video, an unseen interviewer queried Muslim civilians about their "enjoyment" in the new state, especially due to the absence of "infidels."¹⁰⁹ Yet Boko Haram preyed on conquered populations. When Nigerian soldiers recaptured towns before the 2015 elections, they found them devastated.¹¹⁰ Continued massacres illustrated the group's willingness to kill civilians it considered infidels.

Partly because of Chibok, Boko Haram became a major campaign issue in 2014–2015. Jonathan postponed the elections from February to March 2015. Security forces launched an offensive, leaning on contributions from Chad, Niger, and Cameroon and quietly hiring South African mercenaries. On March 27, the eve of the presidential vote, Nigerian forces retook Gwoza, toppling the would-be state. On the voting days, Boko

Haram attacked polling places in the Northeastern states of Bauchi and Gombe,¹¹¹ but even in those two states, voting went forward largely as planned and results were unaffected.¹¹²

In disarray but not defeated, Boko Haram launched a wave of suicide bombings in Northern cities like Maiduguri, Potiskum, Damaturu, Kano, Jos, and Zaria. Nigeria's new President Buhari anticipates the total military defeat of Boko Haram, but it has proved easier to recapture territory than to root out the group's cells.

105. "Boko Haram Declares a New Caliphate."

106. "Boko Haram Declares a New Caliphate."

107. Aderogba Obisesan, "Nigeria's Christians Fear Persecution from Boko Haram Rampage," *AFP*, September 7, 2014, <http://news.yahoo.com/nigerias-christians-fear-persecution-boko-haram-rampage-131841750.html>.

108. Chika Oduah, "How I Escaped Marrying a Boko Haram Fighter," *Al Jazeera*, March 24, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/articles/2015/3/24/how-i-escaped-marrying-a-boko-haram-fighter.html>.

109. "Boko Haram Militants Display Control of Captured Towns."

110. "The War Against Boko Haram," *Vice News*, April 14, 2015, <https://news.vice.com/video/the-war-against-boko-haram-full-length>.

111. "Curfew in Bauchi, NE Nigeria, after Boko Haram Fighting," *AFP*, March 29, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/nigerian-troops-battle-boko-haram-outside-bauchi-115230995.html>; and "Eight Suspected Boko Haram Gunmen Killed in Gombe, Bauchi," *Vanguard*, March 30, 2015, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2015/03/eight-suspected-boko-haram-gunmen-killed-in-gombe-bauchi/>.

112. "INEC: Boko Haram Attacks Will Not Affect Bauchi Results," *This Day*, March 30, 2015, <http://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/inec-boko-haram-attacks-will-not-affect-bauchi-results/205462/>.

Boko Haram, Niger, Cameroon, and Chad

Boko Haram has long troubled Nigeria's neighbors. Much of the impact has been economic and humanitarian, but these dimensions of the crisis are beyond the scope of this paper. In terms of ideology, Boko Haram has found some recruits in neighboring countries: in 2012, Nigerien authorities arrested suspected sect members in Diffa, a Southeastern regional capital relatively near Maiduguri.¹¹³ Boko Haram reportedly paid Nigerien youth to join,¹¹⁴ and at times operated openly in some Diffa mosques.¹¹⁵ It dispatched preachers to Cameroon who sought followers through a combination of money and religious appeals.¹¹⁶ By 2013, Boko Haram had a presence in Cameroon, conducting raids and kidnappings.¹¹⁷ Boko Haram has seemed weaker in Chad, but assessing its trajectory there is complicated due to murky evidence and politicized rumors. Fears are growing about the possibility that Boko Haram will recruit inside camps for displaced persons, but so far there is little evidence of such a trend.

Nigeria's neighbors are vulnerable to Boko Haram recruitment for several reasons. First, as in Northern Nigeria, intra-Muslim debates grip these countries, sometimes as a partial spillover of the intra-Muslim fragmentation within Northern Nigeria. Such debates, particularly intra-Salafi struggles, generate opportunities for new voices to emerge, including ones who preach violence and exclusivism. Second, the countries are poor and the states

are weak: Niger and Chad rank near the bottom of the Human Development Index. Niger's Diffa Region and Cameroon's Far North are remote from their respective national capitals. Third, political space is partly constrained in all three countries, a trend reinforced by the escalation of Boko Haram attacks. Although Niger had a peaceful, democratic election in 2011, its response to Boko Haram has included arresting civil society activists who criticize government treatment of detainees and refugees, as well as expelling refugees themselves. Chad, which is not a democracy, responded to the June and July 2015 suicide bombings in N'Djamena by banning full-face veils for Muslim women and executing ten alleged Boko Haram members. These activities may not in and of themselves create grievances inducing Muslims to join Boko Haram, but they reinforce a sense that the struggle with Boko Haram is all-or-nothing. Boko Haram seeks to exploit this perception: it casts Nigerien President Issoufou and Chadian President Deby as apostate Muslims who have violated the principle of *al-wala' wa-l-bara'* and have become creatures of the godless West.¹¹⁸ Finally, as the involvement of these states in the war against Boko Haram deepened, Niger and Chad have experienced blowback—including a spate of massacres and bombings in Southeastern Niger, and the suicide bombings in N'Djamena.

Buhari hopes to solidify regional cooperation under firm Nigerian leadership. One of Buhari's first deci-

113. "Niger: Diffa Traders Hit by Nigerian Border Closure," *IRIN News*, February 20, 2012, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/94904/niger-diffa-traders-hit-by-nigerian-border-closure>.

114. "BBC Meets Gang 'Paid to Join Boko Haram' in Niger," *BBC News*, April 22, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27107375>.

115. Joris Fioriti, "Once Bustling Niger Border Town in Lockdown over Boko Haram," *AFP*, June 3, 2015, <http://news.yahoo.com/once-bustling-niger-border-town-lockdown-over-boko-065903460.html>;

116. "Fears in Cameroon of Boko Haram Recruitment," *IRIN News*, April 16, 2014, <http://www.irinnews.org/report/99949/fears-in-cameroon-of-boko-haram-recruitment>.

117. Adam Nossiter, "French Family Kidnapped in Cameroon," *New York Times*, February 19, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/20/world/africa/seven-members-of-french-family-kidnapped-in-cameroon.html>; "Boko Haram Steps Up Cameroon Raids," *IRIN News*, July 24, 2014, <http://www.irinnews.org/fr/report/100401/boko-haram-steps-up-cameroon-raids>; and "Cameroon Says 27 Boko Haram Hostages Released," *Daily Trust*, October 12, 2014, <http://www.dailytrust.com.ng/sunday/index.php/news/18400-cameroon-says-27-boko-haram-hostages-released>.

118. Boko Haram, "A Message to the Leaders of the Disbelievers," February 2015, <http://jihadology.net/2015/02/17/al-urwah-al-wuthqa-foundation-presents-a-new-video-message-from-jamaat-ahl-al-sunnah-li-l-dawah-wa-l-jihads-boko-%E1%B8%A5aram-abu-bakr-shekau-a-message-to-the-leader/>.

sions was to move the Nigerian military's headquarters to Maiduguri. He visited Niger and Chad in June, followed by Cameroon in July. He appointed a Nigerian to lead the Multi-National Joint Task Force, which aspires to assemble 8,700 soldiers from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin. In July, as part of a military reshuffle, Buhari selected as Chief of Army Staff and National Security Advisor two officers from Borno. Such moves signal a two-fold break with Jonathan's policies: Buhari intends to work closely with his peers, but does not intend to let them undermine Nigeria's sovereignty and primacy. The regional campaign may destroy some Boko Haram cells, prevent renewed territorial losses, and improve security around Lake Chad. Yet it may also reinforce the mistaken sense, among Buhari and his peers, that Boko Haram can be defeated primarily on the battlefield.

Boko Haram and the Islamic State

Boko Haram joined the Islamic State for strategic as well as ideological reasons. The two movements have common intellectual roots: Yusuf's debt to Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi helps contextualize Boko Haram's later affiliation to the Islamic State. Al-Maqdisi mentored Abu Mus'ab al-Zarqawi, who founded al-Qaida in Iraq, the Islamic State's predecessor organization. Although al-Maqdisi broke with al-Zarqawi and later denounced the Islamic State, it is unsurprising that Boko Haram would find much in common, theologically and politically, with the Islamic State.

The timing of the affiliation reflected Boko Haram's weakness. As with Somalia's al-Shabab and its public affirmation of allegiance to al-Qaida in 2012,¹¹⁹ Boko Haram announced its merger with the Islamic State after suffering territorial losses.¹²⁰ By hitching its wagon to the rising star of the Islamic State and its brand, Boko Haram could claim that its version of Salafi-jihadism has global legitimacy, a propaganda move designed to offset its territorial setbacks. Even before it joined in March 2015, Boko Haram increasingly tailored its propaganda toward global jihadis, professionalizing its media products and emphasizing Arabic over Hausa, bidding to enter the Islamic State's orbit. But with Boko Haram and the Islamic State under military pressure, it is unlikely that copious weapons, fighters, and money will flow from the Middle East to the Lake Chad Basin. It is also unlikely that Islamic State commanders are dictating tactical decisions to Boko Haram, whose attacks remain reactive to regional developments.

Differences between the two movements remain: Boko Haram is less millenarian than its new patron. Rather than preparing for apocalypse,¹²¹ Boko Haram looks to purge the Lake Chad region of alleged unbelief. Boko Haram's posture toward other Muslims is harsher than that of the Islamic State. The latter has committed unspeakable violence against civilians, but has also built political alliances with Sunni constituencies in Iraq and Syria, and has need of some popular support. Boko Haram antagonizes almost the entire spectrum of Muslims in its region, committing atrocities that likely foreclose the possibility of collaboration with any other sizeable Muslim constituency, save other jihadi groups. Boko Haram's brutality could at some point repulse even the Islamic State.

119. Al-Shabab leaders had earlier pledged allegiance to al-Qaida in 2008. See Nick Grace, "Shabaab Reaches Out to Al Qaeda Senior Leaders," *Long War Journal*, September 2, 2008, http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2008/09/shabab_reaches_out_t.php.

120. Terje Østebø, "The Virtual Significance of Boko Haram's Pledge of Allegiance to ISIS," *The Conversation*, March 19, 2015, <http://theconversation.com/the-virtual-significance-of-boko-harams-pledge-of-allegiance-to-isis-38690>.

121. On the Islamic State's millenarianism, see William McCants, *The ISIS Apocalypse: The History, Strategy, and Doomsday Vision of the Islamic State* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

Recommendations to the government of Nigeria

A holistic strategy for countering Boko Haram should recognize that many aspects of the crisis are irreducible to socioeconomic drivers. If President Buhari can reduce corruption and create jobs, it will benefit Nigeria—but it will not necessarily induce Boko Haram's leaders or fighters to choose peace. Similarly, the administration should create a North East Development Commission to revive agriculture and develop infrastructure in North-eastern Nigeria—but such initiatives will not, in and of themselves, address key causes of the uprising. As this paper has stressed, Boko Haram arose from intra-Muslim competition as well as from narratives of grievance against the state and Christians. In keeping with this analysis, the paper offers four recommendations.

First, Nigerian authorities should engage a broader range of Muslim voices in Northern Nigeria and seek to better understand the region's fragmented religious landscape. Federal and state governments should maintain relationships with hereditary rulers, but should also understand that hereditary rulers may distance themselves from politicians in a bid to recover what legitimacy they have lost. Meanwhile, authorities should reach out to Sufis, judges, university intellectuals, classical scholars, and media-savvy preachers and solicit their perspectives on the crisis.

Soliciting diverse Muslim views on the religious dimensions of the conflict is not the same as creating a top-down effort to promote a counter-narrative to Boko Haram. The state can do more harm than good when it intervenes in intra-Muslim debates. It is in the state's long-term interest to ensure that there is a diverse class of autonomous Muslim voices perceived by their constituencies as having integrity. Policymakers should eschew simplistic notions such as the idea that Sufism is the antidote

to Salafi-jihadism, and should avoid demonizing non-violent Salafis. Authorities should offer to protect Salafi leaders who have criticized Boko Haram. When the state reaches out to religious leaders, it should listen more than it speaks. Such communication would serve the dual purpose of changing the image of the state as corrupt and unresponsive, and simultaneously creating channels of information that might help prevent the emergence of further Boko Haram-like movements.

Second, Nigerian authorities should counteract the false but powerful narrative that the state willfully harms innocent Muslims. This would mean investigating inter-religious violence, empowering prosecutors to hold perpetrators accountable, and promoting reconciliation for past conflicts. Authorities should implement durable solutions to cyclical conflicts in Plateau and Kaduna, which are key symbols and targets in Boko Haram's efforts to exploit Nigeria's history of inter-religious violence. Solutions would involve reducing legal and political discrimination against Nigerians who live outside their hereditary state of origin,¹²² mediating disagreements between pastoralists and farmers, and anticipating triggers of violence, including incendiary religious imagery coming from foreign or domestic media.

Third, Nigerian authorities should redress human rights violations that have befallen Boko Haram, and should stop dismissing the findings of human rights organizations. Authorities should identify and prosecute the killers of Muhammad Yusuf, Boko Haram's founder; hold fair trials for accused sect members; end torture of detainees and extra-judicial executions of civilians, and prosecute those responsible; investigate the involvement of political elites in sponsoring the early Boko Haram; and hold C-JTF leaders accountable for abuses.

122. Aaron Sayne, "Rethinking Nigeria's Indigene-Settler Conflicts," United States Institute of Peace Special Report 311, July 2012, <http://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR311.pdf>.

Fourth, Nigerian authorities should extend an open offer of dialogue without preconditions to any Boko Haram member, a move Buhari has indicated he may consider. It is unlikely that Boko Haram's leaders or core fighters would abandon their stated goals of implementing Salafi-jihadism throughout the Lake Chad region. But a gesture of openness and mercy would help counteract Boko Haram's depiction of the state as a tyrannical, ungodly institution, and could lead to negotiations over amnesty for less committed fighters.

U.S. policy toward Boko Haram

U.S. policy toward Nigeria has sought to help increase the country's political stability. During the 2011–2015 political cycle, U.S. policymakers supported electoral reform and urged Nigerian elites to conduct elections peacefully and with integrity. As Boko Haram surged, the U.S. urged the Jonathan administration to promote socioeconomic development in the Northeast and end security force abuses against civilians and detainees. Washington, however, has little sway in Nigeria, given the oil resources available to the state and due to Nigeria's partially accurate perception of itself as an African superpower. Patient engagement by the U.S. played a supporting role in the relatively peaceful conduct of the 2015 elections, but U.S. encouragement for security sector reform had little impact.

With Buhari, some U.S. officials may hope for a “reset,” and may urge renewed efforts to train and equip Nigerian forces against Boko Haram. Yet Buhari cannot reform the Nigerian security forces by fiat; even if he alters policies, rewards merit, and punishes wrongdoing, it is likely that security abuses, indiscipline, and corruption will persist over the medium term. That tendency could make the expansion of U.S. training unwise from both a legal and pragmatic standpoint. Moreover, given the tenacity and flexibility that Boko Haram has exhibited throughout its career, military means alone are insufficient for eliminating the threat the group poses. U.S. training, if pursued, could help reduce abuses and increase professionalization, but policymakers should keep expectations low regarding any far-reaching transformations of the Nigerian security sector.

The U.S. has more influence with Nigeria's neighbors. Niger hosts bases for American military personnel and drones. Chad's Deby is eager to consolidate his status, in the eyes of the French and other governments, as a guarantor of security in West and Central Africa. The

United States trains military units in the region, and has offered assistance to Nigeria and its neighbors on border security. Nigeria and Niger are part of President Obama's Security Governance Initiative, which aims to strengthen military and civilian institutions in Africa. All these initiatives are helpful, but U.S. policymakers should not sacrifice honesty in the name of cooperation: when Nigerian, Chadian, and Cameroonian authorities constrict political space, the United States should react publicly and adjust assistance if necessary. Concerns about Boko Haram, moreover, should not overshadow efforts to address the other, more insidious threats Niger and Chad face, namely food insecurity and climate change. The recent U.S. deployment of 300 soldiers to Cameroon to counter Boko Haram was unwise, for it further militarizes a conflict that will eventually need political solutions.¹²³

The U.S. can be most helpful outside the military sphere, especially by responding to the humanitarian emergency that Boko Haram has caused. The U.S. Agency for International Development has quietly partnered with organizations in Northeastern Nigeria to provide security, food, education, and health care for the displaced, but the severity of the emergency means that the U.S. should offer more help. Placing the emphasis on alleviating suffering would not only be the right thing to do from a moral perspective, it would also help counter perceptions in Nigeria that the U.S.' primary foreign policy tool is force, and that the U.S. is indifferent to the suffering of innocent Muslims. In the long term, the U.S. should continue to urge Nigerian authorities to reform the security forces. Washington should use legal and policy tools—such as revoking visas—to signal a policy of zero toleration for corruption and poor governance in Nigeria.¹²⁴ Finally, the U.S. should avoid taking a position on the issue of dialogue between Lake Chad states and any elements of Boko Haram that are willing to talk.

123. Alex Thurston, “US Strategy against Boko Haram Could Backfire,” *Al Jazeera*, October 22, 2015, <http://america.aljazeera.com/opinions/2015/10/us-strategy-against-boko-haram-could-prove-counterproductive.html>.

124. John Campbell, “U.S. Policy to Counter Boko Haram,” Council on Foreign Relations Special Report No. 70, November 2014.

Conclusion

Boko Haram represents an ugly paradox: its ideas have limited appeal but significant staying power. At the ideological level, its violence is framed by two themes: an exclusivist claim to represent true Islam, and grievances against the state and non-members of the sect. Boko Haram has paired Salafi theology with a commitment to jihad. It has anchored this global ideology in a particular reading of local politics, viewing decades-old inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria, the contentious career of Muhammad Yusuf, and the sect's clashes with the military and the C-JTF as part of a unified narrative of anti-Islamic violence. Acting on its exclusivism, Boko Haram has inflicted massive brutality on civilians, many of them Muslims. The group can be crushed militarily, yet state violence fuels its narrative of victimhood. Countering Boko Haram will require attention not just to material problems in the Lake Chad region, but also to the cyclical violence that has reinforced Boko Haram's sense of victimhood.

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The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World is a research initiative housed in the Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution. The Project's mission is to engage and inform policymakers, practitioners, and the broader public on the changing dynamics in Muslim-majority countries and to advance relations between Americans and Muslim societies around the world.

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