

## Christians Under Siege: The Case of Contemporary Nigeria

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### Abstract

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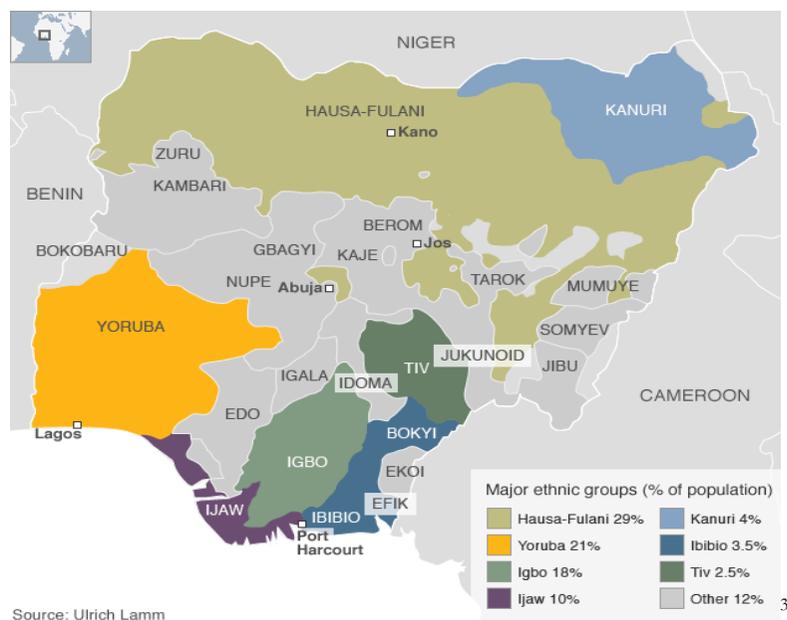
This manuscript pertains to the contemporary persecution of Christians in Nigeria, particularly focusing on the actions of the terrorist group known as the Boko Haram. As demonstrated by a brief overview of present day Nigeria, the bulk of violence is situated in the predominantly Muslim north. Upholding the strict Islamic Sharia code in the northern states has fostered an animosity towards Christian communities and the democratic government which has had little control over the terrorism occurring there. Ever since an emergency state has been declared ushering increased military action in the north, the violence has spiked due to reprisal attacks. Many more civilians are being injured than before the state of emergency was affirmed. The history of Christianity in Nigeria explains the religious polarization of the country. Colonization in Nigeria occurred far more predominantly in the south simply because it was more accessible to European ships. Christian missionaries operated almost exclusively in the south, building schools and hospitals to ingrain themselves in the traditionally Muslim Nigerian society. This exposed the south to ideas of democracy and Western practices as early as the late 1400s. The effects of colonization are ever present, and explain the prevalence of Christianity in contemporary southern Nigeria. The political situation in Nigeria has further divided the country. Oscillating between weak constitutional governance and strong military rule, the government has little faculty to control the violence of terrorist groups, let alone eradicate it. This governmental weakness stems from superficial borders grouping clashing communities together resulting in disputes as to how the nation should be run. This instability allows for Islamic Sharia code to exist in the north and for extremist thinkers to gather followings. Extremist groups are gaining numbers and becoming better resourced as they grow. The predominant terrorist group, the Boko Haram, has been around since 2002. The appearance of the group markedly coincided with the time when Nigeria adopted a Western style government. Officially named “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad,” the group forcefully conveys its anti-Western messages through violence, and it is responsible for shocking amounts of mass killings. In 2012 an offshoot of the Boko Haram—named the Ansaru—emerged. With the full name of “Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black,” this new group denounces the Boko Haram’s indiscriminant killing of civilian Muslims. This probably refers to the Boko Haram’s frequent drive-by attacks, car bombs, and public shootings. The Ansaru, however, are recognized for their kidnappings and for the resourcefulness that the young group has already demonstrated. The Ansaru stress that retaliation violence in response to perceived wrongs is justifiable and encouraged. The impact of this violence is apparent in both the Christian and Muslim communities seeing as many of the civilian casualties are Muslim. Civilians in the north are fleeing to Niger and Cameroon in growing numbers. Church attendance is continuously decreasing for fear of arsons, bombers, and shooting attacks on churchgoers. Western style schools are being continuously attacked, metal detectors are being installed in churches, and motorcycles are even being banned in northern cities for fear of drive by shootings.

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## Overview of Nigeria

With a population of 174 million, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and represents over half of the entire population of West Africa. Although there are over 250 different ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria's population, there are four principle groups that make up the majority of the Nigerian people. The Muslim Hausa-Fulani make up 29% of the population followed by the Yoruba at 21%. The Igbo, or Ibo, comprise 18% of the Nigerian population, the Ijaw 10%. These four main groups are then followed by the smaller populations such as the Kanuri (4%), Ibibio (3.5%), and Tiv (2.5%).<sup>2</sup>

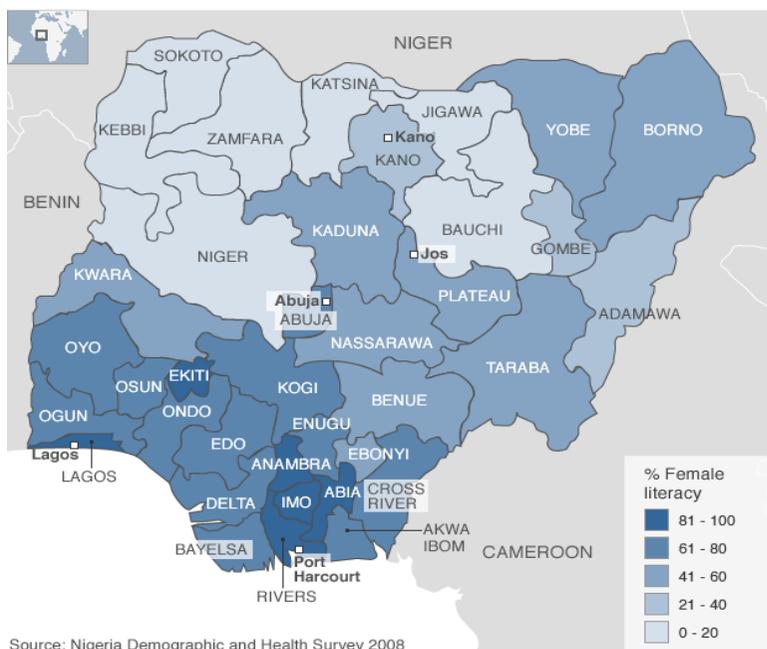


**Figure 1**

The Hausa-Fulani is the largest and most northern group in Nigeria. It represents the gradual merging of the Hausa and Fulani people through marriage and similarities in religion and culture. The religious identity of this group is markedly Islamic which influences much of the regional law. It is notable that the majority of the female population in the northern Hausa-Fulani states remains illiterate, as illustrated by Figure 2.

<sup>2</sup> "The World Factbook." Central Intelligence Agency. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Chothia, Farouk. "Profile: Who are Nigeria's Ansaru Islamists?" BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21510767> (accessed November 6, 2013).



**Figure 2**

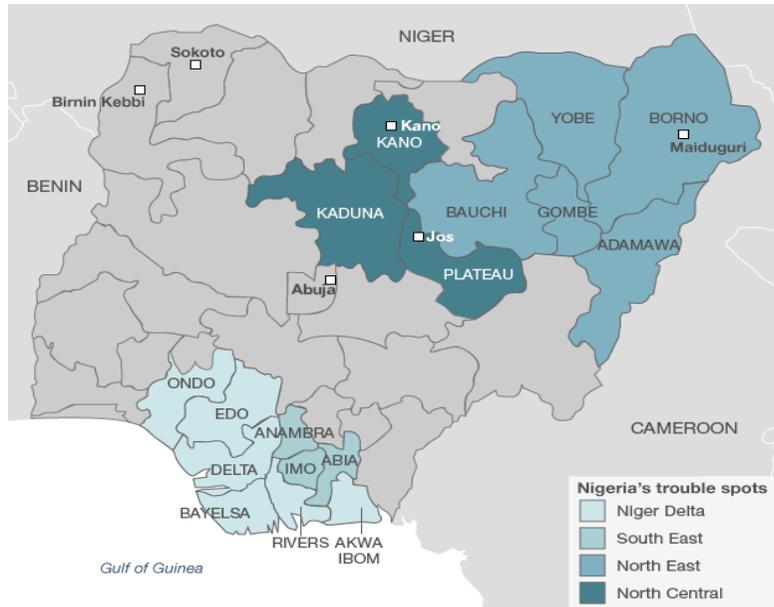
The second-largest Yoruba group is situated in the southwest Lagos region and with a traditionally urban population. The Yoruba were influenced greatly by British colonization which led to a blend of Islamic and Christian tradition. This religions blending has led to modern day conflicts. The Igbo group is smaller yet and located in southeastern Nigeria. Like the Yoruba, the Igbo underwent British rule and influence during the colonization of Nigeria in the 1800s. The smallest of the four major groups is the Ijaw group, which is traditionally situated in the oil-rich lands of the Niger Delta.

The current Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan, is from this group and it is notable that the Ijaw have recently been striving for more political franchise.<sup>5</sup> The Nigerian population is predominantly Muslim which represents roughly 50% of the population. Within the Muslim community, the Sunni group is the most common, including Tijaniyah, Qadiriyyah, and Sufi.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Buhayar, Noah . "Ethnicity in Nigeria." PBS NewsHour. [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/africa/jan-june07/ethnic\\_04-05.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/updates/africa/jan-june07/ethnic_04-05.html) (accessed November 25, 2013).

Izala and Shia minority groups are present as well. The next largest religious group is Christianity at 40%. The Christian groups include various denominations such as Roman Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, Pentecostals, evangelicals, and Mormons. The rest of the Nigerian community, making up roughly ten percent of the population, follows indigenous practice and beliefs.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure From the Map**

As is illustrated by the map, there are a variety of concerns that are specifically linked to the geography of Nigeria. The Niger Delta is a spot of attacks on oil facilities and has been troubled with pirate activity. The South East is known for the repeat kidnappings of politicians and families of politicians.

The North East has particularly been a target of militant Islamist terrorist groups, namely the Boko Haram and Ansaru. The North Central area is a “fault line” between the Muslim majority north and the Christian south, and is therefore in a tense position of violence and animosity between the two groups, in particular the states of Plateau and Kaduna.

<sup>6</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Nigeria: Report on International Religious Freedom." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2012/af/208182.htm> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> BBC. "Guide to Nigeria's trouble spots." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17310808> (accessed November 6, 2013)

Jos, Plateau's capital, has been a specific focal point of church bombings by Islamist groups. Kano—the largest northern Nigerian city—has also been a frequent target of these terrorist groups.<sup>8</sup>

## History of Christianity in Nigeria

After this overview, it is now appropriate to begin our topic with a history of Christianity in Nigeria. The earliest major contact with European Christians can be traced back to the 1470s when Portuguese maritime travelers landed in Benin<sup>9</sup> and introduced Roman Catholicism to the south.<sup>10</sup> Nearly eighty years went by until 1555 when Augustinian monks were sent to Warri by Gasper, the bishop of the Sao Tome diocese. This mission in Warri was relatively unsuccessful due to the difficulty in training indigenous priests. The European missionaries faced unfavorable conditions of heat and humidity, as well as outbreaks of malaria from the mosquitoes. Furthermore, the Portuguese kingdom was on the decline therefore rendering missionary work unsustainable.<sup>11</sup>

It has also been postulated that the presence of the Portuguese slave trade had a contrary effect on the Christian presence in Nigeria in the 1400s. Often times, missionaries had no alternative to travelling by slave ship to Nigeria, and may have even participated in trafficking as desperate measures to support themselves with the decline of the Portuguese empire. With these adverse circumstances, the presence of 15<sup>th</sup> century Catholicism only influenced the immediate areas of Benin and Warri and generally diminished until the 1800s.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Erivwo, Samuel. "First Attempt: Portuguese Catholics at Ode-Itsekiri." History of Christianity In Nigeria: The Urhobo, The Isoko, and the Itsekiri. <http://www.waado.org/UrhoboCulture/Religion/Erivwo/HistoryOfChristianity/ChapterOne.html> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Todd, Paul . "Nigerian History." SIM Nigeria. <http://www.sim-nigeria.org/index.php/nigeria-mainmenu-43/background-and-history-mainmenu-50> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Erivwo, Samuel. "First Attempt: Portuguese Catholics at Ode-Itsekiri." History of Christianity In Nigeria: The Urhobo, The Isoko, and the Itsekiri. <http://www.waado.org/UrhoboCulture/Religion/Erivwo/HistoryOfChristianity/ChapterOne.html> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Todd, Paul . "Nigerian History." SIM Nigeria. <http://www.sim-nigeria.org/index.php/nigeria-mainmenu-43/background-and-history-mainmenu-50> (accessed November 16, 2013).

As with the Portuguese missionaries of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the Christians in the 1800s arrived in Nigeria by sea and landed in the south.<sup>13</sup> Initially, these missions founded hospitals and schools in order to establish a lasting presence in rural areas. These schools lasted up until the 1990s, although many have since been claimed by the government and turned into state institutions “in order to standardize curricula and indigenize the teaching staff.”<sup>14</sup>

Unlike before, this wave of missionaries represented a divided Christianity: it was not only Roman Catholics but a variety of Christian denominations that began to settle in Nigeria. The first Protestant missionaries to arrive in Nigeria were of the Wesleyan Methodist order. Arriving in 1842, these Methodists settled amongst the Yoruba community.<sup>15</sup> Many more Protestant denominations followed. Generally, the larger Roman Catholic and Anglican missions were established immediately after landing and dominated much of the south. After World War I, smaller denominations such as the Jehovah’s Witnesses, Brethren, and Seventh Day Adventists have worked within smaller areas between hubs of Catholic and Anglican influence in order to avoid competition with these larger missions.<sup>16</sup>

This missionary work in the 1800s thrived and it resulted in the establishment of a variety of Christian denominations in southern Nigeria. The Protestant missions, in particular, experienced a great success. This is, in part, due to the generally upheld anti-slavery campaigns in Protestant countries. Following denominations with a history of such campaigns would have been much more tasteful to the Nigerian natives than following denominations with a history of slave trafficking. In fact, it was Protestant Christianity, not Catholicism, which “led the way when the Faith was reintroduced to the Itsekiri and their neighbours, the Urhobo.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Coutsoukis , Photius C. "Nigeria Christianity." Nigeria - Society Index. [http://www.photius.com/countries/nigeria/society/nigeria\\_society\\_christianity.html](http://www.photius.com/countries/nigeria/society/nigeria_society_christianity.html) (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Todd, Paul . "Nigerian History." SIM Nigeria. <http://www.sim-nigeria.org/index.php/nigeria-mainmenu-43/background-and-history-mainmenu-50> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>16</sup> Coutsoukis , Photius C. "Nigeria Christianity." Nigeria - Society Index. [http://www.photius.com/countries/nigeria/society/nigeria\\_society\\_christianity.html](http://www.photius.com/countries/nigeria/society/nigeria_society_christianity.html) (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Eriwwo, Samuel. "First Attempt: Portuguese Catholics at Ode-Itsekiri." History of Christianity In Nigeria: The Urhobo, The Isoko, and the Itsekiri. <http://www.waado.org/UrhoboCulture/Religion/Eriwwo/HistoryOfChristianity/ChapterOne.html> (accessed November 16, 2013).

Today the success of this 19<sup>th</sup> century missionary work is apparent. The Catholic Church asserts 19 million members in the southeast, and the Anglican Church claims roughly 11 million devotees.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth noting that—contrary to the struggle Christianity faced in establishing roots in Nigeria—Islam had already been ingrained in Nigerian history for centuries before Christianity was introduced by the Portuguese. By the eleventh century, Islam had extended to the Bornu Empire and then through the Hausa states by the 1400s.<sup>19</sup> Nearly 500 years prior to the introduction of Christianity, Islam had already established a strong presence in Nigerian history. This is perhaps another condition that stunted the firm establishment of a Christian faith in Nigeria, and could be seen as an historical backdrop for the persecution that Christians are undergoing currently.

### **Politics of Nigeria**

In addition to the historical precedence of the Islamic faith, the politics in Nigeria also fuel the tension between Nigeria's primary religions: Christianity and Islam. The beginning of Nigeria's contemporary political problems began when British campaigns to abolish the slave trade turned into a large scale intervention in foreign affairs of what would become present day Nigeria.

After such a weighty intervention, British authorities decided to assume total jurisdiction over the coastal area of Lagos, a colony of Benin that was founded in 1700 under this British power.

The British occupancy began extending its reaches along the coast, and influenced the culture greatly from the 1850s onward.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Todd, Paul . "Nigerian History." SIM Nigeria. <http://www.sim-nigeria.org/index.php/nigeria-mainmenu-43/background-and-history-mainmenu-50> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Metz, Helen. "Abolition of the Slave Trade." Nigeria: A Country Study. <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/11.htm> (accessed November 20, 2013).

This colonization of the Lagos area resulted in superficial borders that grouped peoples of differing culture, tradition, customs, and religion into one programmed area. The clash of diverse people led to disputes as to how the inhabitants should be governed.<sup>21</sup>

This became of particular concern when constitutions were being drafted for a greater Nigerian autonomy after World War II.<sup>22</sup> The primary disputes that are apparent today between Muslim north and Christian south were already forming during the drafting of these constitutions. The coastal south that had been influenced by Christianity and European thinking since the 1400s was more prone to take a moderate nationalistic stance influenced, in part, by Western systems. On the other hand, the idea of Islamic legitimacy in the north amongst the emirs—or high ranking Islamic officials—had been a fundamental element of the governance in that region. Therefore, the tone of the strong nationalistic sentiment in the north was “decidedly anti-Western.”<sup>23</sup>

After its independence in 1960, the politics and governance of Nigeria was quite unstable. Military rule ensued for the next sixteen years until a new constitution was adopted in 1999.<sup>24</sup>

When this new arena for democracy was opened after this military repression, religious and ethnic groups began to “pursue their demands through violence” in order to gain power in the new system.<sup>25</sup> This new climate led to the paradoxical link of Nigerian democracy and religious clashes.<sup>26</sup>

The weakness of the national government has led to certain northern states enacting an adapted version of the Islamic Sharia criminal code which is locally enforced by a patrol called the Hisbah. The Hisbah enforces policies that are mandated by Islamic faith.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> "Central Intelligence Agency." The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>21</sup> Metz, Helen. "Abolition of the Slave Trade." Nigeria: A Country Study. <http://countrystudies.us/nigeria/11.htm> (accessed November 20, 2013).

<sup>22</sup> "Central Intelligence Agency." The World Factbook. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> (accessed November 16, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> BBC. "Nigeria profile." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>26</sup> "Christians, Muslims At War In Nigeria." NPR News. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124531034> (accessed November 6, 2013).

For instance on November 28, 2013, the Hisbah oversaw the public destruction of over 240,000 bottles of beer to discourage alcohol consumption and other actions deemed immoral by the Islamic faith.<sup>27</sup> This event is represented in Figure 4.

Additionally, as of January 2014 homosexuality has been deemed unlawful by President Goodluck Jonathan. This new law—which is remarkably popular in the entirety of Nigeria—states that homosexuality is a crime punishable by up to 14 years in prison. However, in the Islamic north the punishments are notably more severe. Under Sharia law, sodomy is at least ondemnable by death by stoning, although no cases of stoning have been yet reported. Nonetheless, many individuals await trials in the north under such denunciations<sup>28</sup>.



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**Figure 4**

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<sup>27</sup> Smith, Alexander. "Nigerian police destroy 240,000 bottles of beer in public display of strict Islamic law." NBC News. [http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/\\_news/2013/11/28/21659593-nigerian-police-destroy-240000-bottles-of-beer-in-public-display-of-strict-islamic-law?lite](http://worldnews.nbcnews.com/_news/2013/11/28/21659593-nigerian-police-destroy-240000-bottles-of-beer-in-public-display-of-strict-islamic-law?lite) (accessed February 2, 2014).

<sup>28</sup> Murdock, Heather. "Nigerians applaud anti-gay law as Islamic court hands out 20 lashes." The Christian Science Monitor. <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2014/0117/Nigerians-applaud-anti-gay-law-as-Islamic-court-hands-out-20-lashes> (accessed February 2, 2014).

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

This code, as it has been applied in Nigeria, is often accused of violating human rights “such as the right of minorities to practice the religion of their choice, the right to life, and the right to be free from cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment.”<sup>30</sup> Such forms of degrading punishment range from caning and imprisonment for consuming alcohol—a mandate that directly upholds Islamic principles of alcohol prohibition—to stoning for cases of incest and homosexuality. Some human rights communities, including the Human Rights Watch, condemn this Nigerian Sharia practice as bordering on unusual punishment and torture.<sup>31</sup>

The adoption of Sharia code is an unmistakable indication of the present link between the religion and politics in Nigeria, and it can even signify the domination of regional religion over federal governance. This is not surprising given that religion was prevalent in Nigerian history before any type of local governance was assumed. The colonization of Nigeria by foreign powers grouped people traditionally split by ethnic and political lines into a country that—by modern standards—*must* be governed by a unified law which cannot be agreed upon by these diverse peoples.

This has led to tensions between regions of powerful religious tradition that are trying to secure the interests of their faith in the national governance.

## Religious Tension

After confirming the undeniable fact that religion and politics are intertwined in contemporary Nigeria, it is fitting to delineate which groups are of particular concern. As mentioned before, the divisions of Islamic north and Christian south are the most acute. Not only are the regions divided by religion but also by traditional cultural differences that perhaps go back further than any religious differences. The ethnic groups in the north—particularly the Hausa-Fulani—and the ethnic groups in the south were already defined by pre-colonial boundaries of culture and tradition before the religions of the regions were markedly delineated. The Hausas, for instance “have a legend which traces their ancestry to migrants from the Far-east. So also does a Yoruba legend.”<sup>32</sup> These present day spheres of political loyalty are ingrained even deeper than the religious rifts between Nigerian regions.

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<sup>30</sup> "Human Rights Brief - Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law - Washington College of Law." Human Rights Brief - Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law - Washington College of Law. <http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/10/1nigeria.cfm> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> "Nigeria: History." The Embassy of the Federal Republic Nigeria. <http://www.nigerianembassy.or.kr/nigeria/history.asp> (accessed November 26, 2013).

These cultural and religious rifts are particularly acute in times of weak federal governance, as can be observed by the present day climate of competition between these religious groups. Before addressing the violence that has ensued as a consequence of this competition, it is relevant to mention that these religious groups are also using local government regulations in order to slow the progress of competing religions. There have been complaints from Christians that the local government officials in principally Islamic northern states have used zoning regulations to hinder the construction of Christian churches.

There are also complaints from Muslims in the Christian-majority south of the same nature: it has been reported that local Christian officials have halted construction of mosques as a form of retaliation for the treatment of Christians in the north.<sup>33</sup>

This animosity is, sadly, not restricted to the government playing field, but has led to activity of an increasingly violent nature. Not only is this persecution interreligious, but even present within members of the same religion. For example, on August 8, 2012 personnel from the Kano State arrested 20 Muslims during Ramadan who elected not to fast. These Hisbah personnel allegedly starved the detainees for three days in order to “teach them how to fast.”<sup>34</sup>

This sort of hostility within religions and local state governments is not even the extent of the issues in contemporary Nigeria. This antagonism leads to a topic that is of the greatest concern—both in Nigeria and globally—and of an even more violent nature. Namely, the immense violence from the militant sect “People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet’s Teachings and Jihad,” better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram.

### **Chronology of Violence, Including Birth and Early Action of Boko Haram**

The Boko Haram was born in a climate of government instability and religious tension.

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<sup>33</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012." U.S. Department of State.  
<http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

In 1986, a governmental decree was issued stating that Nigeria was to become a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. This raised concerns from Nigerian Christians who felt that it pushed Nigeria closer to becoming an Islamic state.

Tensions between north and south—Muslim and Christian—only rose in the subsequent years, especially following the election of President Obasanjo in 1999. Born in southwest Nigeria, Olusegun Obasanjo initially served as a military leader from 1976-1979, then as an elected President of the civilian government for two terms from 1999 through 2007.

A devout Christian, his victory over northerner and Muslim Muhammadu Buhari—a champion for Sharia Law—had led to discontent among the northern Muslim states.<sup>35</sup>

Obasanjo's campaign for civilian over military rule and a Western-style democracy expectedly made the northern states afraid for their interests in preserving Sharia Law under an Islamic tradition.

It was during this campaign that the Boko Haram emerged in 2002.<sup>36</sup> The official name of this group "People Committed to the Propagation of the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad" (Hausa: Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati Wal-Jihad) is quite direct in its anti-Western message. The Boko Haram was founded by Muhammad Yusuf. After Yusuf's death in police custody in 2009, control over the group was assumed by Abubakar Shekau (Figure 5.)

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<sup>35</sup> Isaacs, Dan. "Profile: Olusegun Obasanjo." BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2645805.stm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

<sup>36</sup> Ross, Will. "Nigeria's army gunning for Boko Haram." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22811995> (accessed November 6, 2013).



**Figure 5**

Fluent in Arabic, Kanuri, and his native Hausa, Shekau is said to have met Yusuf through a mutual friend while in school as a theology student.

He assumes a distant control of the Boko Haram through an intricate chain of command with limited contact with even the highest officers. The group's message and responses to various events are propagated by videos posted on the internet. Once thought to have been killed in 2009 by police forces, Shekau re-emerged in a video in 2010, not to be seen publicly since.

Massive police crackdowns on the group have seemed to render the Boko Haram more violent as a form of retaliation. He is considered to have planned the UN office bombing in Abuja in August 2011<sup>38</sup> and has been declared a global terrorist with a \$7 million bounty by the United States.<sup>39</sup> Shekau is understood to have a more radical stance than his predecessor with quotes like, "Teachers who teach western education? We will kill them! We will kill them in front of their students, and tell the students to henceforth study the Quran."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Omonobi, Kingsley . "Exclusive: The last days of Shekau, Boko Haram Leader." Vanguard News. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/08/the-last-days-of-shekau-boko-haram-leader-exclusive/> (accessed February 3, 2014).

<sup>38</sup> BBC. "Profile of Nigeria's Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18020349> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> "Boko Haram kill 27, torch 300 homes in Borno." Vanguard News. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/11/boko-haram-kill-27-torch-300-homes-bama/#sthash.vD9Rqc4S.dpuf> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>40</sup> Ibrahim, Raymond . "Attacks on Christians Escalate in Egypt, Nigeria Muslim Persecution of

Since the establishment of the Boko Haram, incidences of violence between Christians and Muslims have risen. Between 1999 and 2006 alone, the BBC has reported that over 10,000 people were killed in sectarian and communal clashes.<sup>41</sup> Burnings of Christian churches and Muslim mosques are prevalent throughout the country, often as retaliation for a previous incident that sparks a domino effect of reprisal between the two religious groups. These instances are generally much like those in mid-November 2008. During this instance, two Christian churches were destroyed in the northern city of Yelwa and later in the same month, and six pastors were murdered in the central city of Jos following local elections. During the ensuing violence, 500 people were killed, 40 churches were destroyed, and 25,000 individuals were displaced.<sup>42</sup>

In the aftermath of this violence, from July 26 to 29, 2009 supporters of Boko Haram launched the group's first recorded attack since its birth in 2002.<sup>43</sup>

The assault spanned four states and targeted police stations and other government facilities.<sup>44</sup> During this three-day assault, 12 Christians were killed, including three pastors who were viciously beheaded for refusing to convert to Islam.<sup>45</sup>

Less than a year later, beginning on March 11, 2010, Islamist members of the Fulani ethnic group launched a series of attacks on three farming villages near the city of Jos. The Islamist members killed an estimated 500 individuals and destroyed 75 homes during this succession.<sup>46</sup> In one specific instance on March 17, 2010, 13 Christians were killed in an attack on the villages of Byei and Baten.<sup>47</sup>

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Christians: July, 2013." Gatestone Institute: International Policy Council. <http://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/3977/egypt-nigeria-attacks-christians> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> BBC. "Bodies pile up after Nigeria riot." BBC News. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4743672.stm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> "Nigeria." The Voice of the Martyrs (Canada). <http://www.persecution.net/nigeria.htm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

<sup>43</sup> BBC. "Boko Haram timeline: From preachers to slave raiders." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22538888> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>44</sup> U.S. Department of State. "2009 Human Rights Report: Nigeria." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/af/135970.htm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

<sup>45</sup> "Pastors beheaded in Borno state." The Voice of the Martyrs (Canada). <http://www.persecution.net/ng-2009-08-12.htm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

<sup>46</sup> "Christians brutally massacred in Plateau state." The Voice of the Martyrs Canada. <http://www.persecution.net/ng-2010-03-11.htm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

<sup>47</sup> "Thirteen Christians killed near Jos." The Voice of the Martyrs Canada. <http://www.persecution.net/ng-2010-03-18.htm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

In another similar instance on July 17, 2010, an armed mob from the Fulani tribe attacked Mazah, a Christian village. In this attack the church leader, Reverend Nuhu Dawat, along with his wife, two children, and grandchild were killed among four others. Several houses and a church were burned.<sup>48</sup> In the same year, December heralded a series of Christmas bombing. The bombings targeted churches in the Plateau State and 32 people died in the explosions. A year later, Christmas Day services were also targeted in multiple cities, killing dozens.<sup>49</sup>

This violence was only the beginning action of the group known as the Boko Haram, and in no way captures every instance of the group's violence. As time has passed, the group's efforts have been magnified and developed into—what many foreign powers consider—actions of a terrorist organization.

### **Rising Action of Boko Haram**

As an effect of the violent actions of the Boko Haram, the U.S. Department of State has deemed it the second most dangerous terrorist group in the world, as of November 14, 2013.<sup>50</sup>

Violence towards Christians—and individuals representing a Western method of thinking—has worsened from 2010-2013 due to the gaining strength of Boko Haram, whose attacks are becoming more violent and more frequent. The group, especially under the command of Abubakar Shekau, intends to turn Nigeria into a fully “pure” Islamic State by not only demanding that all Christians should not only flee their territory, but from the country altogether.

One way in which the Boko Haram intends to achieve this is to have a society ruled solely by drastic Sharia Law which is deemed by many as an infringement upon the rights of freedom of religion in the indigenous religious and Christian communities.

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<sup>48</sup> "Nigerian Christians 'are sitting targets'." Inspire Magazine: News.

<http://www.inspiremagazine.org.uk/news.aspx?action=view&id=4669> (accessed November 30, 2013).

<sup>49</sup> BBC. "Boko Haram timeline: From preachers to slave raiders." BBC News.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22538888> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> “Attacks against Nigeria’s Christians go unnoticed in the West” WORLD. [http://www.worldmag.com/2013/10/attacks\\_against\\_nigeria\\_s\\_christians\\_go\\_unnoticed\\_in\\_the\\_west](http://www.worldmag.com/2013/10/attacks_against_nigeria_s_christians_go_unnoticed_in_the_west) (accessed November 12, 2013).

One such example of this drastic system is in Article 150 of the Sharia penal code that mandates caning and imprisonment for alcohol consumption, regardless of whether the consumption was public or private. This provision is one that clearly and strictly upholds the values of the Islamic faith which prohibits drinking alcohol by any member. Articles 130 and 133 of Sharia Code punish cases of sodomy and incest with one hundred caning lashes and imprisonment, and death by stoning in Articles 127 and 129 in cases of rape and adultery. Such radical penalties uphold traditional Islamic principles, but are considered by modern standards to “violate the right to life and, in many cases, may reach the threshold of torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading punishment.” The punishments are continuously contested by international human rights committees such as Human Rights Watch.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to targeting communities of Christians and religious minorities, the Boko Haram has organized attacks on the government and even fellow Muslims that—the the group’s mind—are acting outside of the strict principles of fundamentalist Islam.

The U.S. Department of State’s *Country Report* on Nigeria states that the “Boko Haram violently murdered hundreds of Christians and Muslims...The group often targeted political and ethnic rivals, religious leaders, businesses, homes, police stations, military installations, churches, mosques, and rural villages using assault rifles, bombs, suicide car bombings, and suicide vests.”<sup>52</sup> The organization’s violence is varied and wide-ranging. There are even suspicions that the group is associated to, or allied with, Al Shabab in East Africa and al-Qaida in the Maghreb.<sup>53</sup>

### **Chronology of the Boko Haram, 2011-2014**

The most recent actions by the Boko Haram are by far the worst in the group’s history since its foundation in 2002. A timeline of foremost events in the Boko Haram’s activity will give an idea of the extensive, and often indiscriminating, destruction of the group.

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<sup>51</sup> "Human Rights Brief - Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law - Washington College of Law." Human Rights Brief - Center for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law - Washington College of Law. <http://www.wcl.american.edu/hrbrief/10/1nigeria.cfm> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> NPR. "After School Attack, Nigeria's President Calls For Unity." NPR. <http://www.npr.org/2013/10/02/228376358/after-school-attack-nigerias-president-calls-for-unity> (accessed November 6, 2013).

As mentioned before, the 2011 reelection of national leader Goodluck Jonathan (from the Peoples Democratic Party) hearkened mob violence in response to Muslim northerner Muhammadu Buhari's loss. Starting April 17, 2011, immediate protests and riots by Mr. Buhari's supporters targeted towns of Kano and Kaduna, the violence of which displaced 16,000 Christians and supporters of Goodluck Jonathan from their homes to seek refuge in police stations.<sup>54</sup> An attack on a Christian village in the Bauchi State on May 7, 2011 killed 16 and wounded several more. In addition to this violence, little more than a week before this attack, four bombs were set off in northeastern Maiduguri killing at least three others. This put the estimated death toll at roughly 516 in less than a month succeeding the election of Goodluck Jonathan.<sup>55</sup>

Whether linked to the election or not, the brutality of the Boko Haram continued through the year 2011.

In June 2011 a suicide bomber killed eight people at police headquarters in Ajuba while in December, Christmas bombings killed forty people. The onset of the year 2012 did nothing to lessen the violence. In January, the group conducted a spree of bombings and shootings at Christian churches, causing the death of over 100 people.<sup>56</sup>

A particularly disturbing account from a Muslim woman who converted to Christianity in a northeast state shows the boundless focus of this persecution. According to her, she received death threats by "anonymous harassers" who she believed to be Boko Haram members. They told her to convert back to Islam and—when she refused—the "unknown gunmen shot and killed members of her immediate family in her home."<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Yushau, Muhammad. "Nigeria election: Riots over Goodluck Jonathan win." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13107867> (accessed December 2, 2013).

<sup>55</sup> BBC. "Nigeria election violence 'left more than 500 dead'." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13184298> (accessed December 4, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> BBC. "Nigeria profile: Timeline." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13951696> (accessed December 4, 2013).

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed November 12, 2013).

In the summer of 2012, more cruelty ensued. In June, the Boko Haram claimed direct responsibility for church attacks in Borno State and Jos City. These attacks injured dozens and took the life of Saleh Abubakar Ningi, a retired Deputy Inspector General for the police. His vehicle was targeted and this attack resulted in the death of the “most senior security official” killed by the Boko Haram to that date. July brought about the first mosque bombing in Maiduguri by a suicide bomber. The target was another high ranking leader in Borno, senior Muslim, Alhaji Abubakar Umar Garbai El-Kanemi. The reason for attacking a Muslim official (rather than a Christian) was stated to have been because of his stance as a Muslim was deemed “too moderate.”<sup>58</sup>

The end of the year brought continued church attacks by the Boko Haram. On November 5, 2012, the group’s gunfire and bombs resulted in 150 deaths and the serious injury of more than 100 others.<sup>59</sup> Christmas Eve ushered attacks that killed a pastor and at least five other Christians in northeastern Yobe and the burning of a church. Maiduguri was also burdened by the deaths of six, including a deacon.

It is estimated that in 2012 alone, the Boko Haram killed more than 770 people, which was the bloodiest year for the group in its existence.<sup>60</sup> Yet another statistic from Israel National News is perhaps more gruesome. It states that an average of 100 Christians died each month as a result of actions of the Boko Haram.<sup>61</sup>

The year 2013 brought markedly more organized action by the Boko Haram. In February, a French family of six was taken hostage “in response to France’s military intervention against militant Islamists in Mali.”<sup>62</sup> This was the first abduction by the main branch of the Boko Haram, although the Ansaru, a branch of the Boko Haram, had committed prior abductions. In a Nigerian government report, the group was demanding a ransom of more than \$3 million to release the family.

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<sup>58</sup> BBC. "Boko Haram timeline: From preachers to slave raiders." BBC News.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22538888> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> BBC. "Nigeria profile: Timeline." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13951696> (accessed December 4, 2013).

<sup>60</sup> "Boko Haram attacks 2 churches in northern Nigeria, kills 12." The Long War Journal.

[http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/12/boko\\_haram\\_launches.php](http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2012/12/boko_haram_launches.php) (accessed December 4, 2013).

<sup>61</sup> Lev, David. "Leader: 'Open Season' on Nigerian Christians by Islamists." Israel National News.

[http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/170433#.UoOsi\\_msg41](http://www.israelnationalnews.com/News/News.aspx/170433#.UoOsi_msg41) (accessed November 13, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> BBC. "Boko Haram timeline: From preachers to slave raiders." BBC News.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-22538888> (accessed November 6, 2013).

Three months later on May 7, 2013 roughly 200 armed men stormed police stations, government buildings, and military barracks using armored vehicles with mounted machine guns. The militants freed 105 prisoners from the stations and 55 people were killed in the attack. As in many of the other assaults, it took place 44 miles away from Maiduguri in the town of Bama.<sup>63</sup>

These well planned attacks point to the Boko Haram being better resourced and better organized than past years of activity. It has grown more vengeful after Nigerian State arrests of individuals thought to be a part of the organization.

One such example of this retaliation happened on May 13, 2013 when the first “slaves” were captured by the Boko Haram. In a video, the group’s leader, Abubakar Shekau, claimed that the women and children—teenage girls included—were taken in retribution for arrests of wives and children of the group’s members.<sup>64</sup> The activity only gets more gruesome as the year progresses. On July 8, 2013 the Mamudo District witnessed a massacre of 42 people at a principally Christian school, dozens of which were children.<sup>65</sup>

Less than two months later, an Anglican priest and his son were killed in the Yobe State on September 26, 2013 after explosives set fire to a church and several homes.<sup>66</sup> Yobe State was again a focal point of violence as it was subject to the September 28, 2013 shooting at the dorms of the Yobe State College of Agriculture—a predominantly Christian school with Western methodology. In this attack, gunmen forced their way through the school’s security and shot over 40 college students in their sleep. In Figure 6, “rescue workers and family members attempted to identify the shrouded bodies of students killed overnight in an attack at an agricultural college in Gujba, Nigeria.”<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> "Brutal Boko Haram Attack Raises Fears for North Nigerian Christian Communities." Persecution News. <http://www.persecution.org/2013/07/08/brutal-boko-haram-attack-raises-fears-for-north-nigerian-christian-communities/> (accessed December 4, 2013).

<sup>66</sup> "Muslim Herdsmen, Islamic Extremists Kill More Christians in Nigeria." Morningstar News. <http://morningstarnews.org/2013/09/muslim-herdsmen-islamic-extremists-kill-more-christians-in-nigeria/> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Nossiter, Adam. "Militants Blamed After Dozens Killed at Nigerian College." Africa. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/30/world/africa/students-killed-at-nigerian-school.html?\\_r=1&](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/30/world/africa/students-killed-at-nigerian-school.html?_r=1&) (accessed December 4, 2013).

Since this attack, students all across Nigeria live in fear of repeat attacks. In Yobe, motorcycles have been banned as they serve as a vehicle for drive-by shootings by the Boko Haram. This has sadly rendered thousands of former motorbike taxi drives—the majority of whom young men—unemployed.<sup>68</sup>



**Figure 6**

On October 31, 2013, the town of Bama was once more targeted by 70 Islamist insurgents who burned 300 homes, killed 27 people, and injured 12 others.<sup>70</sup> After the onslaught in Bama, several motorcycles and 13 vehicles thought to be owned by the Boko Haram terrorists were destroyed in a raid by the Nigerian Army.

<sup>68</sup> Sanusi, Isa. "Nigerian students living in fear." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-24353555> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>69</sup> Nossiter, Adam. "Militants Blamed After Dozens Killed at Nigerian College." The New York Times. [http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/30/world/africa/students-killed-at-nigerian-school.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/30/world/africa/students-killed-at-nigerian-school.html?_r=0) (accessed February 2, 2014).

<sup>70</sup> "Boko Haram kill 27, torch 300 homes in Borno." Vanguard News. <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/11/boko-haram-kill-27-torch-300-homes-bama/#sthash.vD9Rqc4S.dpuf> (accessed November 12, 2013).

A number of the vehicles destroyed by the army were rigged with Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) that were intended to be detonated in villages.<sup>71</sup>

Then, in reprisal for added military security around Maiduguri, a December 2, 2013 attack by 200 Boko Haram gunmen on an air force base resulted in the death of dozens of civilians and soldiers, plus the burning of five aircraft<sup>72</sup>.

The most recent Boko Haram activity in 2014 has appeared to be similar in nature and execution to the attacks that marred 2013. Not a week of the New Year went by without an attack: January 6, 2014 brought an attack on Jos by armed Fulani herdsman who burned houses and stole animals, killing 17 people. Disconcertingly, witnesses say that “at least 30 died, many of them women and children, and some 25 others were injured,” but local police had only placed the toll after the violence subsided<sup>73</sup>. Although not an action yet affiliated with the Boko Haram, this event exemplifies the issues of death toll falsification. This misrepresentation of death tolls by officials—whether because of the confusion of the violence or to lessen the extremity of these events—continues to be a serious problem in Nigeria.

On January 14, 2014 a car bomb was detonated midday in a busy Maiduguri market. Roughly 50 were injured and 40 killed, not to mention the destruction of public space and market stalls. This indiscriminant killing resulted in the deaths of “roadside and ambulatory vendors, parents and their children, motorists, and a police traffic warden.<sup>74</sup>” January 21 occasioned a more directed attack by suspected Boko Haram gunmen who killed the head of a primary school and his friend (who worked at a different school) in Kano. An unspecified number of gunmen broke into the teacher’s house and opened fire.

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<sup>71</sup> "Army kills 7 Boko Haram suspects in Borno." Vanguard News.

<http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/11/army-kills-7-boko-haram-suspects-borno/> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>72</sup> European Country of Origin Information Network. "Updated timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence." Integrated Regional Information Network.

[http://www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/264933/378753\\_en.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/264933/378753_en.html) (accessed January 29, 2014).

<sup>73</sup> Agence France-Presse. "Police confirm 17 killed in raid on central Nigerian village." ReliefWeb.

<http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/police-confirm-17-killed-raid-central-nigerian-village> (accessed January 31, 2014).

<sup>74</sup> Human Rights Watch. "Nigeria: Northern Bombing Highlights Toll on Residents." Human Rights Watch. <http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/01/16/nigeria-northern-bombing-highlights-toll-residents> (accessed January 30, 2014).

The head of the primary school died, and his friend was injured. The gunmen took nothing from the home, discounting the possibility of armed robbery and directing the blame to the Boko Haram<sup>75</sup>.

Often times the violence in Nigerian cities bordering Niger forces an unexpected temporary migration into the neighboring country.

The January 19, 2014 assault in Maiduguri by Islamist gunmen illustrates this point. Seven were shot in Gashigar, a fishing village in Borno state, and three drowned trying to escape the night raid. Most of the villagers fled into Niger during this raid that involved three vehicles, several motorcycles, and the destruction of dozens of homes and shops. A council chairman in the district stated, "We all had to flee. Men, women and children had to cross over to neighbouring Niger for our dear lives." Police authorities affirmed this attack but gave no further details of it. Notably, this attack followed four days after an analogous one in neighboring villages Yawumango and Jabulam in which five were shot<sup>76</sup>. In November 2013, the UN published that some 37,000 people have fled the Northeast into Niger after the military campaign against the Boko Haram (which started on May 15, 2013.) Roughly 29,000 of the displaced are citizens of Niger, illustrating the international scope of this issue<sup>77</sup>.

In Adamawa state, Boko Haram gunmen open fired on Roman Catholic worshippers during service on January 27, 2014. Twenty six are reported dead. On the same day, another market attack scourged Kawuri, a city roughly 23 miles from Maiduguri. According to police commissioner Lawan Tanko, the official death toll has been modified from 45 people to 52.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Agence France-Presse. "Boko Haram' kill teacher in Nigeria: police, locals." ReliefWeb. <http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/boko-haram-kill-teacher-nigeria-police-locals> (accessed January 31, 2014).

<sup>76</sup> Agence France-Presse. "Gunmen kill 12 in raids on Nigerian village, three drown: locals." ReliefWeb. <http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/gunmen-kill-12-raids-nigerian-village-three-drown-locals> (accessed January 31, 2014).

<sup>77</sup> European Country of Origin Information Network. "Updated timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence." Integrated Regional Information Network. [http://www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/264933/378753\\_en.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/264933/378753_en.html) (accessed January 29, 2014).

<sup>78</sup> Agence France-Presse. "Death toll now 52 in Nigeria market attack: police." ReliefWeb. <http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/death-toll-now-52-nigeria-market-attack-police> (accessed January 31, 2014).

## Birth and Early Action of the Ansaru

January 2012 marked the emergence of a new organization named the Ansaru in the north east. Unlike the Boko Haram, which is based primarily in the north east Nigeria, the Ansaru operates in central north in the center of the Hausa-Fulani region: particularly within and around Kano.<sup>79</sup> Although operating in different regions, the Ansaru is thought to be an offshoot of the Boko Haram.

Recent theological debates amongst Boko Haram members and discord under the leadership of Abubakar Shekau within the past couple years may have resulted in the appearance of the Ansaru

The Ansaru surfaced six months after its creation with a video that was released by the group. The video vowed to protect Muslims globally by attacking Westerners and those following a Western methodology.<sup>80</sup> According to French journal *Jeune Afrique-L'Intelligent*, the Ansaru is led by Abu Ussamata al-Ansary and the newspaper known as *Nigeria's Standard* states that the Ansaru has condemned the Boko Haram's method as brutal to the Muslim community due to its indiscriminant killing of innocent Nigerian civilians. In the video dispersed by the group, its leader al-Ansary stated that "Islam forbids killing of innocent people, including non-Muslims. This is our belief and we stand for it." This seems to be referencing the Boko Haram's frequent practice of drive-by shootings (as in Yobe) and bombs that often cannot target individuals and ultimately kill civilians. Since the appearance of the Ansaru, it has been noted that the Boko Haram has used significantly fewer suicide attacks. Perhaps the advent of the Ansaru group has make suicide attacks "doctrinally problematic (because of their indiscriminate nature)."<sup>81</sup> The group's video, however, also expresses that non-Muslims may be attacked in retribution for attacking Muslims.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Cook, David . "Boko Haram: Reversals and Retrenchment." Combating Terrorism Center. <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/boko-haram-reversals-and-retrenchment> (accessed November 13, 2013).

<sup>80</sup> Chothia, Farouk. "Profile: Who are Nigeria's Ansaru Islamists?." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21510767> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>81</sup> Cook, David . "Boko Haram: Reversals and Retrenchment." Combating Terrorism Center. <http://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/boko-haram-reversals-and-retrenchment> (accessed November 13, 2013).

<sup>82</sup> Chothia, Farouk. "Profile: Who are Nigeria's Ansaru Islamists?." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21510767> (accessed November 6, 2013).

Considered a terrorist group by the UK, the Ansaru's full name in Arabic is the Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan, meaning "Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black," and it is expected to have links to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.<sup>83</sup> Its activity is marked by repeat kidnappings in northern Nigeria of foreign citizens, which included the capture of seven foreign construction workers in Bauchi State who are suspected to have been killed.<sup>84</sup>

There is debate as to what actions are those of the Ansaru and which belong to other groups in Nigeria.

This is, in part, because the Ansaru group is so young and also because there is so much violence in northern Nigeria that it is often hard to tell the motives, let alone the group behind them. There is also a theory that the Boko Haram has adopted other names and pseudo leaders in order to mask their action and identity as a group, rendering the Ansaru a false entity. Whether or not the Ansaru has a separate objective than that of the Boko Haram, the group was declared a terrorist organization by the U.S. Department of State on November 14, 2013.<sup>85</sup> Notably, the Boko Haram and the Ansaru were declared terrorist groups by the U.S. on the same date.

### **Chronology of the Ansaru**

Although the Ansaru group is quite young compared to the Boko Haram, BBC News has compiled a timeline of their actions that reveals an early streak of violence. In March 2012, the group killed two hostages—one British and one Italian—in north western Sokoto state. In December 2012, 30 Ansaru gunmen forced entrance to a compound in northern Rimi town using dynamite: their aim was to abduct Francis Colump, a French national who was working on a wind power project at the time. One month later, the group killed two Nigerian soldiers claiming that they were targeting the Nigerian military because it "was joining the French-led military campaign to 'demolish the Islamic empire of Mali.'"

In February, again only one month later, seven foreign nationalists were captured from a housing compound by the Ansaru.

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> BBC. "Guide to Nigeria's trouble spots." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-17310808> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>85</sup> Ross, Will. "What 'hostage video' reveals about Nigeria's Boko Haram." BBC News. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21601578> (accessed November 6, 2013).

The attack was said to have been revenge for “‘transgressions’ by European nations in Mali and Afghanistan, where Western forces are battling Islamist insurgents...the group released a video saying it had killed the ‘Christian’ hostages because the UK and Nigerian forces were planning an operation to rescue them—an allegation the UK denied.”<sup>86</sup> Within such a short time after its creation, the Ansaru is more active and seems to be more organized and better resourced than the Boko Haram was at its birth.

### **Impact of Violence on Christians**

The impact of the increasing violence against Christians in Nigeria is apparent. Christian groups claim that circumstances of church razing is constantly underreported in the media, therefore the actions of these terrorist groups may be even more substantial than what has been recorded. Many churches have resorted to installing metal detectors in the entrances. Fear of these groups has led to the decline of church from 30 to 70 percent, as reported by church leaders.<sup>87</sup> These safety measures seem to do little to mitigate the climate of fear in the Nigerian Christian community. According to Obadiah Diji, youth leader of the Kaduna Christian Association, “Women have been told not to carry hand bags because of the fear that an attacker may come under the guise of a worshipper, hiding a gun or bomb in a hand bag.”

In a firsthand account from a Boko Haram captive, the organization and methods of the group are exposed. Victim, Hajja, was nineteen years old when she was kidnapped in Gwoza, a district of Borno State. Her last name has been concealed to protect her family. While working in the corn fields, Hajja was taken by two gunmen to the rugged Gwoza hills. Hajja accounted how

“If I cried, they beat me. If I spoke, they beat me. They told me I must become a Muslim but I refused again and again...They were about to slaughter me and one of them begged me not to resist and just before I had my throat slit I relented. They put a veil on me and made me read from the Koran.”

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<sup>86</sup> Chothia, Farouk. "Profile: Who are Nigeria's Ansaru Islamists?." BBC News.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-21510767> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed November 12, 2013).

This account illustrates the recent Boko Haram tactic of kidnapping Christian women and converting them before forcing them to marry soldiers. In many ways, this tactic recalls that of Kony Lord's Resistance Army in Uganda. Hajja cooked and cleaned for the ever-moving group of fourteen guerrilla soldiers. She was used as bait to attract citizens that were also kidnapped and killed. She also noted that the Muslim wife of the group's leader participated in these killings. After three months as a slave, Hajja feigned stomach pains in order to be sent to a hospital where she escaped.

Once free, Hajja said, "I finally tore off the veil and I cried." She now lives in Abuja, Nigeria's capital<sup>88</sup>.

## Conclusion

The danger for Nigerians in general not only comes from the Boko Haram and Ansaru, but from the Nigerian military efforts to control the terrorist group. The Joint Task Force that have been deployed since 2010 to combat the Boko Haram<sup>89</sup> have been blamed for violating human rights with wrongful detention in harsh conditions, inadequate meals and medical treatment, overcrowding leading to unsanitary conditions, and even cases of physical abuse and rape. In fact, Amnesty International reported that in the first half of 2013, more than 950 people died in military detention in Nigeria. According to the U.S. Department of State, "female prisoners pregnant at the time of incarceration gave birth to and raised their babies in prison."<sup>90</sup>

Apart from problems with decent incarceration conditions, the Task Force has been reportedly acting extrajudicially, killing prisoners without fair trial and making arbitrary arrests that lead to "prolonged pretrial detention; denial of fair public trial; and executive influence on the judiciary".<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Brock, Joe. "Insight: Boko Haram, taking to hills, seize slave brides." Reuters. [http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/18/us-nigeria-security-islamists-insight-idUSBRE9AG04120131118?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter&dlvr.it=992637](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/18/us-nigeria-security-islamists-insight-idUSBRE9AG04120131118?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter&dlvr.it=992637) (accessed February 1, 2014).

<sup>89</sup> "Military." Nigeria. <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/nigeria.htm> (accessed November 13, 2013).

<sup>90</sup> U.S. Department of State. "Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2012." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/index.htm#wrapper> (accessed November 12, 2013).

<sup>91</sup> U.S. Department of State. "2009 Human Rights Report: Nigeria." U.S. Department of State. <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/af/135970.htm> (accessed November 30, 2013).

In northeastern Nigeria, there are complaints that civilians are being “rounded by the military and branded as Boko Haram terrorists”<sup>92</sup> without due cause.

It is also notable that on November 7, 2013 President Jonathan’s request for an extension of the emergency rule was approved by the Nigerian senate.

Since this act, violence of the Nigerian military against Boko Haram insurgents in the northeast has inflated from 667 deaths from 117 clashes in the five months before the extension to 1,708 deaths in 83 clashes in the five subsequent months<sup>93</sup>. These numbers have resulted in skepticism of these methods of repressing the terror group, and also show that reprisal violence from the Boko Haram often catches civilians in the middle.<sup>94</sup>

The Human Rights Watch condemns the “Nigerian security forces’ heavy-handed response to this violence,”<sup>95</sup> referencing the mass arrests and excessive force that has marked the recent Nigerian military campaign. Once such example is in the December 4, 2013 affirmation by the Nigerian army that 1,400 suspected BH members were held for months without a so much as a hearing. Only 500 of these detained suspects were ultimately recommended for trial.<sup>96</sup> In mid January 2014, President Goodluck Jonathan fired his his “military top brass” in frustration with the military’s counter-insurgency campaign<sup>97</sup>. This is perhaps due to criticism of the military’s violent methods, or for their lack of apparent results in the north.

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<sup>92</sup> Quist-Arcton, Ofeibebe. "Nigerian Civilians Caught In Crackdown On Islamists." NPR. <http://www.npr.org/2013/10/18/236697007/nigerian-civilians-caught-in-crackdown-on-islamists> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>93</sup> Brock, Joe. "Insight: Boko Haram, taking to hills, seize slave brides." Reuters. [http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/18/us-nigeria-security-islamists-insight-idUSBRE9AG04120131118?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&utm\\_source=dlvr.it&utm\\_medium=twitter&dlvrit=992637](http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/11/18/us-nigeria-security-islamists-insight-idUSBRE9AG04120131118?feedType=RSS&feedName=topNews&utm_source=dlvr.it&utm_medium=twitter&dlvrit=992637) (accessed February 1, 2014).

<sup>94</sup> European Country of Origin Information Network. "Updated timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence." IRIN: Updated timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence. [http://www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/264933/378753\\_en.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/264933/378753_en.html) (accessed January 29, 2014).

<sup>95</sup> Human Rights Watch. "World Report 2014: Nigeria." Human Rights Watch. <http://www.hrw.org/africa/nigeria> (accessed January 30, 2014).

<sup>96</sup> European Country of Origin Information Network. "Updated timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence." IRIN: Updated timeline of Boko Haram attacks and related violence. [http://www.ecoi.net/local\\_link/264933/378753\\_en.html](http://www.ecoi.net/local_link/264933/378753_en.html) (accessed January 29, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> Agence France-Presse. "Death toll now 52 in Nigeria market attack: police." ReliefWeb. <http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/death-toll-now-52-nigeria-market-attack-police> (accessed January 31, 2014).

It is uncertain what long term effects this move by Jonathan will have for the situation in the north, but it is probable that a temporary instability will follow with the reshuffling of these higher military positions.

The situation in Nigeria is nearly incomprehensible to residents of almost every other country in the world. Although this manuscript has only focused on the religious tensions that fuel aggression and terrorist action, it is also pertinent to point out that there are other sources of violence in Nigeria as well. Resources as well as “longstanding ethnic divisions” add another layer of complexity to these disputes.

It is undeniable, nonetheless, that “when the killings begin, religion does become the marker by which people kill and protect each other...whether one is a Christian or Muslim does become the dividing line, especially in the middle belt.”<sup>98</sup> Political disputes over concerns over election processes, legitimacy of candidates, and lack of government transparency and stability often lead to ethno-religious conflicts: religion becomes a quick way to identify the interests of other groups and a way to generally direct retribution and frustration. The government helplessness in these matters allows this violence to continue nearly uncontrollably as there “almost no social institutions to address the cessation of violence.”<sup>99</sup> When the military does intervene, it usually sparks retribution attacks on government facilities on top of the initial attacks on other religious groups.

With the birth of a second terrorist group, the gaining strength of the Boko Haram, military heavy handedness, and government absence in the north, Nigeria will surely be marred with continued violence. The coming presidential election on February 14, 2015 is sure to bring with it similar violence that marked the past 2011 election of President Goodluck Jonathan of the People’s Democratic Party.

As mentioned earlier, more than 800 were killed in the northern riots that ensued after this election, and these riots are to be expected in 2015.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> "Christians, Muslims At War In Nigeria." NPR News.

<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=124531034> (accessed November 6, 2013).

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Olatunde, Joel . "Nigeria to hold presidential vote on February 14, 2015." ReliefWeb.

<http://reliefweb.int/report/nigeria/nigeria-hold-presidential-vote-february-14-2015> (accessed January 31, 2014).