



# BOKO HARAM

## Background

- Boko Haram, which means “Western education is forbidden,” is an Islamic extremist organization based in northeastern Nigeria. Mohammed Yusuf, an influential cleric in the region, formed the group in 2002 with the expectation of creating a strict Islamic state in the predominantly Muslim northern half of the country.
- In 2009, Yusuf led an uprising against the Nigerian government that left hundreds dead. As a direct result, police captured and killed Yusuf. Abubakar Shekau, Yusuf’s second in command, took charge of the group and launched an insurgency that continues today. The conflict has killed over 32,000 people and displaced 2.3 million. Boko Haram has since expanded its operations into neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.
- Shekau pledged his allegiance to ISIS in March 2015. In August 2016, ISIS announced that Abu Musab al-Barnawi, the son of Yusuf, replaced Shekau as the leader of Boko Haram. Shekau refused to cede authority, causing the group to split. His faction remained Boko Haram, and those loyal to Barnawi became ISIS West Africa.



*Abubakar Shekau, leader of Boko Haram, in an undated photo*

## Threat to New Jersey: Low

***Boko Haram has never conducted an attack in the United States, and its operational capability is limited due to its focus on operations in Chad, Cameroon, Niger, and Nigeria, as well as competition from ISIS West Africa for dominance in the region.*** Boko Haram remains regionally focused, conducting insurgency operations in West Africa. From January 2019 to February 2020, Boko Haram conducted large-scale attacks that resulted in approximately 76 fatalities within its operational regions near the borders of Nigeria.

- In 2019, Boko Haram claimed multiple attacks targeting Nigerian military positions. The group released videos and statements taking responsibility for many attacks and displaying “war spoils” to supply their fighters. In October 2019, the group released a video titled, “There is no Glory Except in Jihad,” where the narrator called for fighters to remain patient and continue fighting.
- Boko Haram is implicated in a suicide bombing in June 2019 that left 30 people killed. According to open source information, three suicide bombers, most likely attributed to Boko Haram, detonated suicide vests in Konduga, Nigeria, outside a hall where soccer fans watched a game. The attack targeted civilians in a local market.
- In 2014, the group kidnapped 276 schoolgirls from Chibok, a village in northeastern Nigeria. In October 2016, 22 of the schoolgirls were rescued following negotiations with the Nigerian government, 83 more were freed in May 2017, and an additional 57 escaped as of September 2017. As of February 2020, 112 schoolgirls are still missing, according to open source information.



*In February 2020, suspected Boko Haram fighters set several trucks carrying passengers on fire, killing at least 30 people.*

## US Nexus

***Boko Haram is unlikely to inspire homegrown violent extremists in the United States because of its prioritization of local Nigerian issues over global extremist narratives and its focus on carrying out attacks locally.*** Although the group has only attacked US interests regionally, the US Government has expressed concern that the threat from Boko Haram could spread to justify military action.

- Boko Haram’s media outreach focuses exclusively on regional issues, including criticism of the Nigerian government, calls for violence against civilians, and demands for an Islamic state in Nigeria. The group does not encourage Westerners to travel and join its ranks.
- In March 2017, Nigerian authorities disrupted an alleged Boko Haram-orchestrated plot to attack the US and British embassies in the capital city of Abuja. Five suspects were arrested after they “perfected plans” for the attack.
- A letter sent to Congress in June 2017 outlined US Armed Forces deployments, including in Cameroon, where “approximately 300 US military personnel are also deployed, the bulk of whom are supporting US airborne intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance operations” on Boko Haram fighters. This deployment marks the most direct involvement by the United States in the campaign against Boko Haram.

## Additional Resources

[2020 Terrorism Threat Assessment](#)

[Terrorist Organizations Continue Kidnapping Operations in Africa](#)