



Factsheet

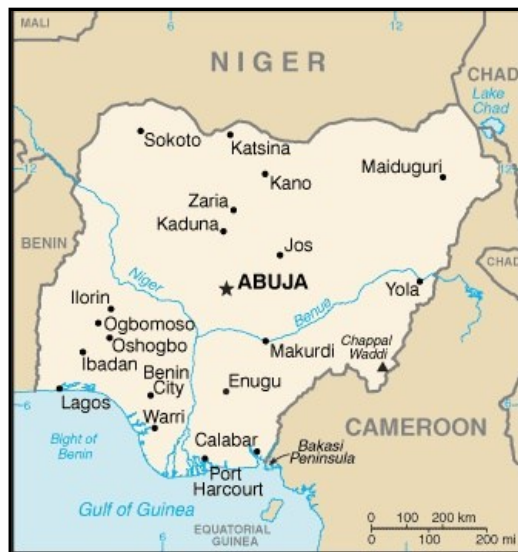
NIGERIA

Nigeria: Boko Haram's Religiously-Motivated Attacks

August 2013

THE U.S.
COMMISSION ON
INTERNATIONAL
RELIGIOUS
FREEDOM

was created by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 to monitor the status of freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief abroad, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and related international instruments, and to give independent policy recommendations to the President, Secretary of State, and Congress.



For more than a decade, the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) has reported on the continuing violations of religious freedom and religiously-related violence taking place in Nigeria. In 2009, USCIRF recommended for the first time that the U.S. government designate Nigeria a “country of particular concern” (CPC) for the Nigerian government’s failure to address at both state and federal levels ongoing, egregious and systemic religious freedom violations that have resulted in over 14,000 deaths from sectarian violence since 1999. The majority of religious freedom violations have resulted from religiously-motivated violence in the northern and Middle Belt states, as well as the implementation of Shari’ah law in the 12 northern states.

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In the past two years, Boko Haram has become the primary perpetrator of religiously-related violence and gross religious freedom violations in Nigeria. Boko Haram's targets include churches, individual Christians, Muslim critics, and persons engaged in behavior deemed "un-Islamic," as well as northern elders, schools, police stations, government buildings, newspapers, and banks. International Criminal Court prosecutor Fatou Bensouda in November 2012 and again in August 2013 stated that there is a "reasonable basis" to believe that Boko Haram has committed crimes against humanity in Nigeria. Since January 1, 2012, Boko Haram's religiously-motivated attacks have included:

- 50 churches that either were bombed, burned, or attacked, killing at least 366 persons;
- 31 separate attacks on Christians or southerners perceived to be Christian, killing at least 166 persons;
- 23 targeted attacks on clerics or senior Islamic figures critical of Boko Haram, killing at least 60 persons; and
- 21 attacks on "un-Islamic" institutions or persons engaged in "un-Islamic" behavior, killing at least 74.

Boko Haram (a Hausa-language name northern Nigerians gave to the militants that means "western education is a sin") originated in northern Nigeria's Yobe and Borno states in 2002 and is now a dangerous threat to Nigeria's stability. The group regards the federal and northern state governments, as well as the country's political and religious elites, as morally corrupt. It further rejects the West and the secular state, seeking the universal implementation of "pure" Shari'ah law to resolve the ills northern Nigerian Muslims face. While the 12 northern Nigerian states already apply Shari'ah in their jurisdictions, Boko Haram believes that it has been corrupted by politicians for their own purposes.

In July 2012, USCIRF released a factsheet, [*Religious Freedom Violations and Religious Violence in Nigeria*](#). This factsheet updates the earlier report and documents Boko Haram attacks on churches, individual Christians, Muslim critics, and persons engaged in "un-Islamic behavior" from July 2012 to July 2013.

The information in this factsheet was garnered from the reports by U.S.-based non-governmental organizations that track violence in Nigeria, international news wires, and Nigerian media. Only attacks claimed by or attributed to Boko Haram that are reported in at least two sources are included in the factsheet. Given these considerations, Boko Haram most likely has committed more attacks than are cited here.

Recommendations: Responding to the Threat of Boko Haram

Boko Haram's attacks against Christians, along with continued Muslim-Christian violence, threaten to undermine Nigeria's fledgling democracy. Religion is becoming an increasingly central factor as much of the violence results from the misuse of "faith" to foster political, economic, and/or ethnic discord, thereby elevating religious identifications and transforming violence in Nigeria's north and Middle Belt into religious conflicts. In addition, the Nigerian government's toleration of communal, sectarian violence has created a permissive environment conducive to further violence and a culture of impunity.

To date, the Nigerian government primarily has taken a military approach in responding to Boko Haram. In May 2013, President Goodluck Jonathan declared a state of emergency in, and deployed its military to, Adamawa, Borno, and Yobe states. President Jonathan previously declared a six-month state of emergency in December 2011 in six northern states. The Nigerian government also has initiated some non-military responses to the Boko Haram threat, including offers for peace talks and the formation of a committee to explore amnesty for Boko Haram militants.

In USCIRF's view, Nigeria has the capacity to address communal, sectarian and Boko Haram violence by enforcing the rule of law and making perpetrator accountable through the judicial system, and not relying solely on a counterterrorism strategy involving the security services. Such an approach would help Nigeria realize lasting progress, security, stability, and prosperity as a democracy. The United States can play an important role in encouraging and increasing the capacity of the Nigerian judiciary to undertake this kind of response.

However, the U.S. government also needs to recognize the sectarian aspects of the ongoing violence and the religious elements in Boko Haram's ideology. Acting on such an understanding would better position the United States to engage with both the Nigerian government at all levels and key religious leaders who view the violence partly through a sectarian lens. The United States also should do more to encourage and support the Nigerian government's efforts to provide additional security personnel to protect northern Christian minorities and clerics and Muslim traditional rulers who denounce Boko Haram attacks, and consider creating a witness protection-like program.

Boko Haram's Religiously-Motivated Attacks July 2012 - July 2013

Attacks on Churches

Boko Haram frequently bombs or shoots into churches during services in an effort to maximize casualties. It attacked churches during the Christmas holidays for three consecutive years from 2010 to 2012 and attacked Easter services in April 2012. Between January 1, 2012 and July 31, 2013, USCIRF has documented at least 50 separate church assaults. Between July 1, 2012 and July 31, 2013, the following attacks took place:

July – December 2012

- July 15, Okene, Kogi State: A car bombing near the Living Faith Church. No one was killed. Two suspects were arrested.
- August 6, Okene, Kogi State: Gunmen attacked the Deeper Life Bible Church. Twenty persons were killed.
- August 6, Lokoja, Kogi State: An improvised explosive devise (IED) was discovered at Revival House Church before it detonated. No one was killed.
- August 9, Gajiganna, Borno State: Gunmen burned the Church of Brethren (EYN) church and shot the pastor's son in the leg. No one was killed.
- August 12, Gombe, Gombe State: Gunmen tried to enter All Saints Catholic Church, but could not get past the gate. The police officer guarding the church was killed.
- August 19, Damagun, Yobe State: Gunmen were repelled during attacks at a Catholic Church and a police station. No one was killed.

- September 23, Bauchi, Bauchi State: A suicide bombing at St. John's Catholic Church. Four persons were killed and 48 were injured. A security barrier prevented the vehicle from directly accessing the church, causing the bomber to detonate early.
- October 18, Bauchi, Bauchi State: A suicide bombing at a Church of Christ in Nigeria (COCIN) church in the Zango area. No church members were killed.
- October 19, Atagara, Borno State: Gunmen attacked a church near Cameroon border. Four persons were killed.
- October 28, Kaduna, Kaduna State: A suicide bomber attacked St. Rita's Catholic Church. Fifteen persons were killed and dozens injured.
- November 8, Buni Yadi, Yobe State: Gunmen shot into three churches, and also attacked police and a police station. No one was killed.
- November 25, Kaduna, Kaduna State: St. Andrew's Protestant Church, located in the Armed Forces Command and Staff College, was attacked by a suicide bomber. Thirty persons were killed.
- December 1, Borno State: Four churches were attacked throughout the state, including arson attacks on the EYN church, COCIN church, and Deeper Life Church. A church security guard was killed.
- December 24, Potiskum, Yobe State: Gunmen attacked a COCIN church during services before setting it on fire. Five persons, including the pastor, were killed.
- December 24, Maiduguri, Borno State: Gunmen attacked the First Baptist Church. No one was killed.

January – July 2013

- December 30, Chibok, Borno State: A church bombing. Thirty persons were killed.
- April 7, Maiduguri, Borno State: A gun attack on an EYN church was repelled. No one was killed.
- April 7, Mildu Shalmi, Adamawa State: A gun attack on the EYN church. No one was killed.
- May 5, Maiha, Adamawa State: Shooting into a church. Four persons were killed.
- May 25, Gwoza, Borno State: Churches in Gharaza, Tadigle and Himbe neighborhoods were burned. No one was killed.
- June 5, Gwoza, Borno State: The COCIN church was burned. No one was killed.
- June 13, Gwoza, Borno State: Gunmen attacked churches in the Hwa'a, Kunde, Gjigga, and Gathanhure communities. Three persons were killed.

Attacks on Christians

On January 2, 2012, Boko Haram called on all Christians and southerners (because they are presumed to be Christian) to leave northern Nigeria within three days or face death. In the week following this declaration, more than 30 Christians were shot to death. Boko Haram continues to target and kill individual Christians and southerners. Between July 1, 2012 and July 31, 2013, the following attacks took place:

July – December 2012

- August 7, Maiduguri, Borno State: Pastor Ali Samur was shot and killed.

- November 9, Gaidam, Yobe State: Gunmen killed five Igbo traders.
- November 18, Maiduguri, Borno State: Retired COCIN church pastor Reverend Elisha Kabura was killed while he and his family prepared to go to church.
- November 25, Kano, Kano State: A Christian couple and their son were shot to death on their way to church.
- December 1, Borno State: Christians' throats were slit and their houses burnt during a series of Boko Haram attacks on four churches (*see Attacks on Churches*).
- December 28, Musari, Borno State: Fifteen Christians were killed in their sleep.
- March 18, Kano, Kano State: A suicide bomb exploded at a bus station in the Christian district of Sabon Gari. Twenty-five persons were killed. The bus station is used to transport passengers to the predominately Christian south.

January – July 2013

- May 14, Maiduguri, Borno State: The Christian Association of Nigeria's (CAN) Secretary in Borno, Reverend Faye Pama Musa, was murdered.
- May 24, Gwoza, Borno State: Reverend Luka Bazhigila of the All Denomination Church was shot and killed.
- June 8, Gwoza, Borno State: Two Christians were killed where a COCIN church had been burned on June 5 (*see Attacks on Churches*).
- June 10, Gwoza, Borno State: Reverend Jacob Kwizer of the COCIN church was killed.
- June 14, Yobe State: Five Igbo traders were killed.
- July 30, Kano, Kano State: Four bombs exploded in the Christian area of Sabon Gari. At least 45 persons were killed, and two churches were damaged (Christ Salvation Pentecostal Church and St. Stephen's Anglican Church).

Attacks on Muslim Leaders and Critics

Boko Haram also attacks and kills imams and other Muslims opposed to the group. These assassinations are intended to intimidate other Muslims from speaking out against Boko Haram. Between July 1, 2012 and July 31, 2013, the following attacks took place:

July – December 2012

- July 2, Maiduguri, Borno State: A bomber attacked the Shehu of Borno Central Mosque. The Shehu of Borno is Nigeria's second highest Islamic leader and the Deputy Governor of Borno. Nine construction workers were killed.
- July 8, Maiduguri, Borno State: Gunmen attacked the Shehu of Borno's private residence. One person was killed.
- July 13, Maiduguri, Borno State: A suicide bomber attacked the Shehu of Borno's palace. While the Shehu survived the attack, nine people were killed.
- July 29, Kano, Kano State: Gunmen and bombers attempted to attack the mosque in the Jan Bulu area near Bayero University, but were repelled by policemen. The seven perpetrators were killed.
- August 3, Potiskum, Yobe State: The Emir of Fika escaped a suicide bombing attack after Friday prayers at the central mosque.

- September 30, Zaria, Kaduna State: A bomb exploded near an Islamic school run by Awwal Adam Albani, a prominent anti-Boko Haram cleric. He was unharmed.
- October 14, Maidugri, Borno State: Gunmen killed traditional leader Shettima Kanurebe, a close friend of the Shehu of Borno.
- December 3, Potiskum, Yobe State: Gunmen killed cleric Alarama Dan Gobobirawa in front of his family.

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- January 7, Kano, Kano State: Gunmen shot into a crowd of Muslim worshipers preparing for evening prayers. No one was killed.
- January 19, Kano, Kano State: Gunmen attacked the Emir of Kano's convoy. Five persons were killed.
- March 28, Potiskum, Yobe State: Gunmen fired on a mosque in the Fillin Allah area. One person was killed.
- May 4, Ngamdu, Yobe State: Gunmen killed two clerics critical of Boko Haram, including Cleric Mallam Sheriff.

Attacks on “Un-Islamic” Behavior and Institutions

Boko Haram calls for the implementation of its interpretation of Sharai'ah law in northern Nigeria. As such, it frequently targets institutions it deems “un-Islamic” and persons engaged in behavior it considers “un-Islamic.” Between July 1, 2012 and July 31, 2013, the following attacks took place:

July – December 2012

- July 19, Kano, Kano State: Gunmen fired on card players. Three persons were killed.
- October 4, Jalingo, Taraba State: A bomb exploded near a beer garden and in an area known for prostitution. One person was killed.
- November 23, Maiduguri, Borno State: Twenty women wearing mini-skirts were killed.
- December 23, Kano, Kano State: A bomb exploded outside a bar. No one was killed.

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- January 22, Kano, Kano State: Five persons playing an outdoor board game were shot to death.
- February 22, Gombe, Gombe State: Gunmen attacked card players. Five persons were killed.
- February 23, Ngalda, Yobe State: Gunmen attacked a bar. Six persons were killed.
- April 9, Gwoza, Borno State: Gunmen killed three card players.