



NIGERIA

Quick Facts

Population: 190,632,261

Area: 923,768 sq km

Ethnic Groups: Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, is composed of more than 250 ethnic groups; the most populous and politically influential are: Hausa and the Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Igbo (Ibo) 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%.

Religions: Muslim 50%, Christian 40%, indigenous beliefs 10%

Government Type: federal presidential republic

GDP (official exchange rate): \$405.4 billion (2016 est.)

Source: CIA World FactBook (Last Updated January 2018)

Since its independence in 1960, Nigeria has been plagued by a number of organized militant groups. Among them are Niger Delta militants in southeastern Nigeria, whose grievances are based on extreme environmental degradation, as well as political and economic disenfranchisement. Additionally, there are ethnic-based militants in Nigeria's Middle Belt, where the predominantly Muslim northern region and predominantly Christian southern region meet. There are often conflicts among ethnic groups of different religions over land use. In recent years, Muslim Fulani herders have been increasingly arming themselves and killing Christian villagers in unprecedented numbers, albeit without any centralized coordination. Finally, there are Islamist militants in northern Nigeria, such as Boko Haram and also the potentially violent pro-Iranian Shi'ite Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN). These two groups seek to establish an Islamic state in Nigeria (for Boko Haram, a Sunni-Salafi state, and for the IMN a Khomeinist Shia state), to institutionalize Islamic law and an Islamic identity for the country, to pry Nigeria out of its alliances with Western countries, and to reorient it toward the Islamic world.

Since September 2010, Boko Haram has become the greatest threat to Nigeria's unity and has been responsible for more violence than any other militant movement in the country (although the Fulani herders may soon reach the same level of violence, if

not notoriety, as *Boko Haram*). More than 20,000 people have been killed to date in the fighting. Millions more have been displaced, and close to 5 million need food assistance, due to *Boko Haram*'s disruption of the local economy.¹ *Boko Haram* is the most violent on the spectrum of Islamist movements in Nigeria, but it is divided internally between two factions, one of which is loyal to the Islamic State and known as the Islamic State's West Africa Province, or ISWAP. The other independent group is *Jama'atu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal-Jihad* (The Group for Preaching the Prophet's Teachings and Jihad, or JAS), which is loyal to Islamic State caliph Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi but is not recognized by the Islamic State as one of its affiliates. Both are referred to as "*Boko Haram*" by the media and government, although neither group refers to itself as such.

ISLAMIST ACTIVITY

In addition to ISWAP and JAS, which are northern Nigeria's most violent Salafist-jihadist groups, there are thousands of other Islamist groups in Nigeria, including millenarian mahdists, Salafists, and Shia fundamentalists. There are also many religiously moderate, albeit socially conservative, Sufi groups of the Qadiriyya and Tijaniyya orders, as well as *Jama'atu Nasril Islam* (JNI), a northern Nigerian Muslim umbrella organization led by the Sultan of Sokoto. In contrast to violent Islamist leaders, JNI has called on Muslims to "pray fervently for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria and for Allah to put to shame those who are bent on chaos and unrest."²

Nigerian universities have long been hotbeds of Islamist activity. Most leaders who are at the forefront of Islamic extremism in northern Nigeria have their roots in the universities, where they have been able to give theoretical cover to radical ideas and use academic platforms to spread their message. Two noteworthy trends in Nigeria, which are consistent with the rest of the Islamic world, are that youths are the primary demographic group susceptible to radicalization, and that men gravitate towards radicalization more than do women.

This section describes four of the most prominent Islamist groups in northern Nigeria: JAS and ISWAP (both commonly referred to as "*Boko Haram*" in media and government discourse); *Maitatsine/Kala Kato*; *Jama't Izalat al Bid'a Wa Iqamat as Sunna* (*Izala*); and the Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN).

Nigerian Taliban, JAS and ISWAP (Boko Haram)

JAS and ISWAP both trace their lineage to Mohammed Yusuf, a Nigerian preacher who maintained his headquarters in northeastern Nigeria's Borno State. He primarily taught that Western education and influence were blasphemous because they contradicted the Quran, and that service in the Nigerian government was unacceptable, as Nigeria was not an Islamic State. Veteran al-Qaeda ideologue Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi had a significant influence on Yusuf's adoption of a strain of Salafi-Jihadi ideology consistent with al-Qaeda's, although Yusuf did not explicitly cite al-Maqdisi in his sermons.³ As Yusuf gained in popularity in the late 2000s, his teachings began to generate opposition from mainstream Salafists, who had previously mentored him; one such scholar argued that if Muslims follow Yusuf's advice, then "pagan policemen [who serve in government] will kill and injure Muslims, and when taken to hospitals pagan doctors and nurses [with Western education] will attend to them."⁴

Although Yusuf began urging his followers, who numbered in the thousands and

hailed from Nigeria, Niger, Chad, and Cameroon, to prepare for conflict with the Nigerian government, he did not begin his career with a full-throated commitment to violent jihad.⁵ This was different than some of Yusuf's more militant predecessors in a group then called the Nigerian Taliban, who were killed in late 2003 by the Nigerian security forces. After 9/11, they sought to engage in a jihad in Nigeria because they believed living in an un-Islamic state required immediate government overthrow.⁶ They also had at least some level of communications with al-Qaeda's external operations in Pakistan.⁷ Yusuf, in contrast to the Nigerian Taliban leaders, was more patient than his predecessors who were killed in 2003.

During his leadership of the organization (2003 to 2009), Yusuf's followers did not engage in coordinated violence against the state, although occasional clashes with Nigerian security forces did occur, usually because of the followers' refusal to obey local ordinances. In Yusuf's own words, he believed that sharia law "should be established in Nigeria, and if possible all over the world, but through dialogue."⁸ Jihad, for Yusuf, was an option, but not as much of an obligation as it is to jihadists in groups such as al-Qaeda or Islamic State, or as it was to the Nigerian Taliban. Yusuf believed that a jihad could be delayed so long as Nigeria's Muslim rulers could still be convinced of their "infidelity" in ruling by secular laws and would be willing to change and adopt sharia laws after being convinced. However, the Nigerian rulers' continued resistance to recognizing their "infidelity" throughout the 2000s meant that jihad became an increasingly viable option for Yusuf and his followers.

Yusuf was killed along with approximately 1,000 of his followers in a four-day series of clashes with the Nigerian government in northeastern Nigeria in July 2009; Yusuf seems to have launched a jihad after he realized the current system in Nigeria was unable of changing itself to an Islamic system from within. After the clashes, Yusuf's deputy, Abubakar Shekau, and other followers announced a jihad against the Nigerian government and security forces, Christians, and moderate Muslim religious and political figures. This was the first time the group claimed a formal name: JAS. JAS's first attack took place on September 7, 2010, when approximately 50 fighters attacked Bauchi Prison and freed fellow members detained in the July 2009 clashes, making good on the organization's promise that these prisoners would not spend the holiday of Eid al-Fitr behind bars. It has since become known that Yusuf was cultivating ties to al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) that Shekau activated immediately after he became leader. Once Yusuf died, Shekau, for example, sent high-level Boko Haram members to meet with AQIM leaders, who then offered Boko Haram financial and training support.⁹ Shekau even sent a letter to thank AQIM for training and financial generosity after the Bauchi prison break.¹⁰

Since the Bauchi prison break, JAS has carried out more than 1,000 attacks and killed in excess of 20,000 people in an area of operations ranging from its hub of operations in northeastern Borno State to Kogi State in the geographic south of Nigeria, to Sokoto in northwestern Nigeria, to Diffa in Niger, to northern Cameroon, and to N'djamena and other villages around Lake Chad in Chad.¹¹ AQIM has, however, become opposed to Shekau because of his tolerance for killing Muslims or anyone who has opposed him.

At a minimum, JAS's main objectives are to: 1) remove religious authority from the Sultan of Sokoto and other traditional Muslim leaders and place religious authority in the hands of JAS's religious leaders; 2) create an Islamic state in some or all parts of Nigeria; 3) prosecute the security officers who killed Mohammed Yusuf and other Muslims; and 4) obtain amnesty for all JAS members in prison and compensation for the mosques and the homes of Muslims that have been destroyed in clashes with the government. Only

the second and fourth goals have, to some extent, been achieved. Since 2014, JAS has controlled territory in parts of southern Borno State, especially around Sambisa Forest, Nigeria and as of 2017 mostly carries out sharia punishments in those areas. This is not as much territory as JAS might prefer, but may be sufficient for some of its commanders.¹² In addition, while many JAS members remain in prison, some hostage exchanges, including for 23 and 82 Chibok schoolgirls in late 2016 and early 2017, respectively, have led to the release of several key JAS members.¹³

Despite some of JAS's successes, its killings of innocent Muslims during attacks on the government and security forces—both as collateral damage and as a means to intimidate Muslims in the general population—has been one factor that has bred dissent among the movement's members. In late January 2012, a more internationally oriented faction of the group, which called itself Jama'atu Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan (Vanguards for the Protection of Muslims in Black Africa, or "Ansaru"), announced its formation in a video statement and in fliers distributed in Kano.¹⁴ This occurred after Boko Haram's January 20th attacks left more than 170 civilians dead.¹⁵ Ansaru has since been proscribed as a terrorist group by the United Kingdom for its alleged involvement in the kidnapping and killing of two British and Italian men in Sokoto State in March 2012, and for being "broadly aligned" with al-Qaeda.¹⁶ Ansaru began raising its online media profile in November 2012, around the same time that its fighters carried out a prison break in Abuja.¹⁷ Then, in December, Ansaru then kidnapped a Frenchman in Katsina, 30 miles from the border with Niger, and warned France that the prisoner's fate would be contingent on France rescinding the law banning the Islamic veil and ceasing its planned attack on the Islamic state in northern Mali (the Frenchman later escaped captivity).¹⁸ In January 2013, Ansaru also kidnapped seven foreigners in Bauchi State and killed them the following month, after alleging that the UK and Nigeria were preparing to conduct a rescue attempt (one of the seven captives was British).¹⁹ Ansaru also jointly claimed a kidnapping with the larger JAS in December 2013 of a French priest in Cameroon, who was later released for a multi-million dollar sum of money and JAS militants imprisoned in Cameroon.²⁰

By 2014, however, Ansaru was virtually extinct operationally, although it continued to issue statements. Despite initially offering itself as a more "humane" alternative to JAS, three factors led to its demise: the French-led intervention in northern Mali in 2012-13, which separated Ansaru from its AQIM patrons, the arrests of key Ansaru members by Nigerian special forces, including those who received funding from AQIM, and JAS's assassinations of Ansaru commanders who defected from JAS. As the joint claim of the French priest in Cameroon suggested, Ansaru members, partly out of desperation, rejoined JAS and brought with them their kidnapping and media specialized skills, especially in the Lake Chad region. Some Ansaru members held out in Bauchi State until early 2015, when JAS leader Shekau pledged loyalty to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State. Ultimately, however, most of Ansaru appears to have been swallowed by the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP), or to have withdrawn from militancy and retreated to social media to continue propagating their beliefs.

Several months after JAS reintegrated the bulk of Ansaru into its ranks, a second major division occurred when Shekau pledged allegiance to Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and the Islamic State.²¹ In doing so, JAS officially became known as the Islamic State's West Africa Province, or ISWAP, in March 2015. Nigeria, under new president Muhammed Buhari, subsequently launched a large-scale military offensive against ISWAP, which caused the

group to lose control of much of the territory in northeastern Nigeria that JAS had controlled prior to the pledge. These battlefield frustrations, as well as lingering ideological disputes between Shekau and the former Ansaru members over his tolerance for killing ordinary Muslims, ultimately led to a fracturing of ISWAP. The former Ansaru members who had rejoined JAS became recognized by the Islamic State as ISWAP in August 2016, under the leadership of Muhammed Yusuf's son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi.²² Shekau, meanwhile, was compelled to leave ISWAP with his loyalist fighters, and subsequently announced in August 2016 that he was reverting to the name JAS.²³

Today, both ISWAP and JAS remain active, with the former largely operating in scattered territory in the Nigerian the Lake Chad region, and the latter focused on disparate territories in Borno State. For the most part, the groups remain at odds with each other. Other factions more moderate than JAS have also reportedly offered to negotiate with the Nigerian government since 2012, but such groups have little credibility and have quickly disappeared from the scene. This is because JAS and ISWAP are behind almost all of the Islamist violence in northern Nigeria, and any truce with the factions other than JAS and ISWAP is likely to be inconsequential.²⁴

Maitatsine/Kala Kato

Kala Kato, which means "mere man," in reference to the Prophet, claims to be an offshoot of the Maitatsine sect of the 1980s, which was led by the Cameroonian Mohammed Marwa. Marwa claimed to be a new Prophet of Islam and was known as the "Maitatsine," meaning "the one who damns." Even more extreme and eccentric than Boko Haram founder Mohammed Yusuf, Marwa condemned anyone who read any book other than the Quran, used watches, cars, bicycles, televisions, cigarettes or any other products that reflected Western life. An antecedent not only to Kala Kato but also to Boko Haram, Marwa and his thousands of followers clashed with Nigerian authorities in a battle in Kano in 1980 in which Marwa was killed. Subsequent battles to suppress his followers also took place in Borno State in 1982; Gongola State (present-day Gombe State) in 1984; and Bauchi State in 1985. In December 2009, Kala Kato engaged in a series of riots and clashes with the Nigerian security forces in Bauchi State, resulting in the deaths of 70 people, including soldiers, policemen, women and 15 children.²⁵ The cause of the clashes was Kala Kato's violation of an ordinance against preaching outdoors, which was imposed following the Boko Haram clashes of July 2009.²⁶ Kala Kato remains one of the most obscure Islamist groups in northern Nigeria, and its leader, Mallam Salisu, has maintained that it "has no link with the Boko Haram followers."²⁷ Kala Kato remains a small group of approximately 2,000 members, and likely will not have appeal to future generations of Islamists or jihadists, who are likely to see Boko Haram as a more "legitimate" group to join because of the credibility it has received from the Islamic State and its greater adherence to general Salaf-jihadi ideology. Nonetheless, Kala Kato and similar groups can be placed on a spectrum of heterodox forms of Islamic extremism that for the time being pose little threat of violence directed against the state, Muslims who disagree with them, or Christians.

Jama't Izalat al Bid'a Wa Iqamat as Sunna (Society of Eradication of Innovation and Implementation of the Sunna) (Izala)

The Izala movement in Nigeria is an anti-Sufi Salafist movement that opposes bid'a (innovation) and seeks direct interpretation of the Quran. It was established with funding

from Saudi Arabia in the late 1970s, in part as an effort to quell then growing pro-Khomeinist leanings among northern Nigerian Muslims. It opposes the “Westernization” of Nigerian society, albeit while accepting modern technology and sciences and embracing women’s education and financial self-sufficiency. With many institutions all over the country and influence at the local, state and even federal levels, Izala has become one of the largest Islamist societies not only in Nigeria, but also in the neighboring countries of Chad, Niger, and Cameroon. The implementation of sharia law in twelve northern states since 2000 has provided legitimacy for the Izala movement, which claims to have been the “vanguard” of the pro-sharia movement, although the inefficiencies and corruption scene in the sharia implementation since 2000 has led many Nigerian Muslims including not only those in Boko Haram to question the sincerity of Izala’s sharia project altogether.²⁸

Today, Izala’s most important contribution to the Nigerian Islamist landscape may be simply that it is not Boko Haram and presents a credible and non-violent option for Islamists, even though in the early 2000s some Izala leaders had mentored Boko Haram leaders.²⁹ Nonetheless, the rising anti-Shi’a sentiment in Nigeria, coupled with broader anti-Iranian sentiment in Saudi Arabia and the Middle East, has positioned Izala also as the main anti-Shi’a group in Nigeria.³⁰ In this context, Izala may turn violent not so much as a facet of its Salafi-jihadism, but in an effort to clamp down on Shi’ism in Nigeria or inspire anti-Shi’a violence.

Islamic Movement in Nigeria (IMN)

The IMN is distinct from other Islamist groups in Nigeria because it is supported by the Islamic Republic of Iran, whereas most other groups (like Izala) are supported by Saudi Arabia and other wealthy Sunni Muslim sponsors. The leader of the IMN, Shaykh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, has alleged that the IMN is only an “Islamic Movement,” rather than either “Shi’a” or “fundamentalist,” but the common perception of the IMN in Nigeria is that it is in fact a Shi’a movement.³¹ Although the IMN’s members are mostly Shi’a, the IMN resembles Izala and Boko Haram in that it believes secular authorities should not hold power and that northern Nigeria’s traditional religious rulers have allowed government abuses against Muslims by supporting Christian politicians and refusing to stand up for Muslims.³²

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Ibrahim el-Zakzaky and his followers petitioned for the implementation of sharia law, and sought to bring about an Islamic revolution similar to that which occurred in Iran in 1979. In the 1990s, followers associated with the IMN, who later broke away from the IMN and embraced Sunni-Salafism, carried out a series of attacks in northern Nigeria, the most gruesome of which was the 1994 beheading in Kano of Gideon Alakuka, an Igbo trader who was accused (likely falsely) of desecrating the Quran.³³ When sharia law was instituted in twelve states of northern Nigeria in 2000, el-Zakzaky believed there was an over-emphasis on corporal punishments; that the northern governors were illegitimate since they did not come to power through Islamic parties; and that the governors were dishonest people “who amputate the hands of poor people, who steal peanuts, while those who steal millions of tax-payers’ money go scot-free.”³⁴ Since 2001, the IMN has committed itself to involvement “in national or international issues that are of concern to Muslims, as well as in solidarity with oppressed sections of the Muslim Ummah such as the Palestinians and Iraqis.” The movement has also voiced support for Osama bin Laden and al-Qaeda, implying in 2001 that it would attack U.S. interests in Nigeria if the United States or Israel attacks Iran.³⁵ El-Zakzaky has also made frequent and

well-publicized visits to Iran.³⁶

After years of steady growth in followers, particularly around el-Zakzaky's base in Zaria, Kaduna State, in December 2015 the Nigerian army violently cracked down on the IMN, killing around 300 members.³⁷ El-Zakzaky was reported to have been heavily wounded during the crackdown and taken to a military hospital in Lagos. However, rumors persist that he was killed in the incident, because in the two years that have followed he has not resurfaced, and many of his close affiliates and family members were likewise killed or missing.³⁸ The Nigerian government has also restricted public protests that called for more information on el-Zakzaky's whereabouts.³⁹ This has also led to the initiation of a #FreeZakzaky campaign by his followers, and to international criticism of Nigeria for human rights abuses against the IMN.⁴⁰ The Nigerian army—possibly guided by the anti-Iran coalition of countries in the Arab World—supported the action against the IMN because el-Zakzaky had created a virtual state in Zaria, with its own police, media, and schools reminiscent of and arguably modeled after Hezbollah in Lebanon. Although unproven, there are also rumors that Saudi Arabia encouraged the elimination of el-Zakzaky in an effort to blunt Iranian influence in Nigeria.⁴¹

ISLAMISM AND SOCIETY

Nigeria's 170 million citizens are divided almost evenly between Muslims and Christians, with Muslims forming the majority in the northern half of the country and Christians forming the majority in its southern half. With more than 80 million Christians and a roughly equal number of Muslims, Nigeria is both the most populous Christian country in Africa, and the most populous Muslim one.⁴² The Hausa and Fulani (often referred to as the "Hausa-Fulani" because of their close cultural interaction for the past several centuries) constitute the largest single Muslim ethnic group in Nigeria, and about one-fourth of its total population. The Muslim Kanuri ethnic group is most prevalent in Yobe and Borno States and is about 4% of Nigeria's population.⁴³ The Yorubas of southwest Nigeria are about 60% Christian and one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria along with the Hausa-Fulanis and the Igbos of southeast Nigeria. At an estimated 12 million, Yoruba Muslims are second only to the Hausa-Fulanis in terms of total Muslim population in an ethnic group. There are dozens of other predominantly Muslim ethnic groups in Nigeria, including the Shuwa Arabs of Borno State, who trace their lineage to the Arab tribes who migrated into northeastern Nigeria from the Sudan centuries ago.

Almost all Muslims in Nigeria are Sunni Muslims of the Maliki school. However, about five to ten percent of Nigeria's Muslims are Shia, and they can be found throughout northern Nigeria, particularly in Kaduna State but also in large numbers in Sokoto, Kano and Yobe and in recent years also in southern Nigeria. The number of Shi'a Muslims has increased since the Iranian Revolution of 1979, which brought an Islamic government to power in Iran. Ibrahim el-Zakzaky has been the leader of the Shi'a (IMN) with the financial and ideological support of Iran. The rise of Shi'ism in Nigeria has led to a rivalry between the majority Sunni population and Shi'as, and there have been instances of Sunni mobs or Sunni leaders ordering the destruction of Shi'a mosques and attacking Shi'a communities, with the violence reaching a culmination in December 2015 with the Nigerian army's crackdown on the IMN and general approval of this action from the Nigerian Sunni community.⁴⁴ Iran's sponsorship of Shiism in Nigeria and West Africa more broadly nonetheless suggests Shiism is likely to

grow in future decades.⁴⁵

However, conflict is most frequent between Muslims and Christians as they compete for a greater share of political and economic power in Nigeria. Election season in the country tends to generate the most tension. Muslims tend to believe that, since they often claim to constitute more than 70% of Nigeria's population, the 2011 victory of the Christian presidential candidate Goodluck Jonathan over the Muslim candidate Muhammad Buhari (by 58% to 32% of the vote) was likely fraudulent. Anger over this issue contributed to an increasing sense of marginalization among Nigerian Muslims, which has since been alleviated by Muhammed Buhari's victory in the presidential elections in 2016 and Jonathan's stepping down from the position without reservation. Boko Haram has exploited this anti-democracy and anti-Christian tension by staging dozens of attacks on churches and Christians in northern Nigeria. Most recently, Muslim-Christian violence has been seen in the context of Muslim Fulani herdsmen, who are now armed with machine guns (as opposed to the sticks they traditionally carried), raiding Christian farmlands and often killing Christians they find therein. This has, in turn, led to reprisals.⁴⁶

Over-population also contributes to religious tensions as Muslim groups from northern Nigeria migrate into Christian areas in the Middle Belt, prompting competition over land use, as well as competition between the faiths to proselytize new members. The Sultan of Sokoto, who also leads the Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), has said that "The rise of secularism and the increasing activities of western evangelical organizations have made it all the more urgent that the message of Islam shall be heard loud and clear and the JNI must play a leading role in this endeavor."⁴⁷

ISLAMISM AND THE STATE

Although the word "secular" is not specifically used in the Nigerian Constitution, Section 101 of that document provides that, "The Government of the Federation or of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion." Nonetheless, in practice religion plays such a large role in the state that Nigeria is not truly secular, a status which many religious leaders and citizens acknowledge.⁴⁸

Islam, for example, enters the governmental sphere in several ways: the country observes Islamic holidays such as Eid el-Fitr, Eid al-Adha and Milad al-Nabi; the government is involved in organizing the Hajj pilgrimage; Islamic slogans in the Arabic language are featured on the country's currency and army insignias; Islamic sermons are delivered in public places; and, most significant of all, twelve states in northern Nigeria have implemented sharia law since 2000.

This controversial implementation is inextricably linked to politics, as many northern governors seem to support sharia law less out of religious devotion than out of a desire to portray themselves as "defenders of faith" in order to gain political advantage and to mitigate their lack of support from mainstream Muslims. Through a veneer of dedication to Islam, these politicians attempt to win the support of the masses and stifle criticism or, in many cases, investigations into their corrupt behavior. Some religious scholars have argued that the traditional rulers, including the sultans and emirs, who have no formal authority but serve as political advisers and maintain influence through their social status, are really opposed to sharia law because it does not permit hereditary succession, which is the basis of their positions.⁴⁹ Izala, the IMN and Boko Haram all believe that the Sultan and other

traditional rulers are apostates for accepting a version of “half-sharia” in which secular institutions like elections and democracy exist side by side with Islam.

Although Islam is not formally a state institution in Nigeria, Muslims organizations play an important role in the country. With the advent of sharia law in twelve northern states starting between 1999 and 2001,⁵⁰ these organizations have begun to challenge the secular nature of the country, although the struggle in implementing sharia has reduced the desire to completely overturn the secular system for an Islamic system, at least in the near-term future. Boko Haram, meanwhile, seeks to completely overthrow both the secular and the traditional Muslim establishment in Nigeria and create an Islamic state akin to the “caliphate” established by ISIS in Iraq and Syria. As of 2017, the group has achieved some success in controlling territory in Borno State and removing the Nigerian government’s presence altogether. Although Boko Haram isn’t likely to achieve this goal throughout Nigeria, Islamist groups are nonetheless gaining more and more traction in West Africa, while, in North Africa and the Arab World, pressure to adopt certain tenets of political Islam is becoming increasingly mainstream. A convergence of these forces makes it likely that the secular nature of the Nigerian state will continue to face a challenge from regional Islamist forces, which may in turn erode Nigerian Muslims’ support for the secular authorities governing their country. The saving grace for Nigeria may, paradoxically, be that Boko Haram’s violence has turned much of the Muslim citizenry away from jihadism so much agitation for Islamism will remain rhetoric and less violence.

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