Please cite as: EASO, '2.1. Individuals targeted by Boko Haram' in *Country Guidance Nigeria*, octobre 2021.

2.1. Individuals targeted by Boko Haram

COMMON ANALYSIS
Last update: February 2019
*Minor updates added October 2021

This section looks into the situation of the following sub-profiles in the areas where Boko Haram operates:

a. persons perceived as government supporters
b. Christians
c. persons considered as 'infidels', including those rejecting the insurgents' strict interpretation of Sharia
d. journalists
e. teachers and others working in education
f. health workers
g. IDPs.

For the targeting of women and girls by Boko Haram, see under Women and girls.

COI summary

[Targeting, 2.1, 3.1]

The activities of Boko Haram concentrate in North-East region, especially Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, although increasing influence and incidents are also reported in the North-East region and in Niger state in the North-Central region.

Boko Haram uses violence indiscriminately against civilians in the areas where it operates. However, some profiles are particularly targeted by the group. These include:

a. Perceived government supporters

[Targeting, 2.5.4.6, 3.1.2; Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.1]

Both JAS and ISWAP are known to target those associated with the government, including government officials and civil servants, politicians, traditional leaders, CJTF members, contractors etc. For example, Boko Haram fighters have attacked communities where CJTF militias were formed and killed anyone they suspected to be a member of the CJTF, and in some cases all young men and boys in these communities.

b. Christians

[Targeting, 3.1.4; Security situation 2021, 2.8, 2.13]

There are numerous reports of destruction of churches and killing of Christians, including reports of beheading of Christians who refuse to convert to Islam. In an incident in 2014, Boko Haram reportedly beheaded those Christian men who refused to convert and married off the women to Boko Haram fighters. Attacks against Christian communities by Boko Haram continued in 2020 and 2021, leading to many deaths and many residents fleeing.

c. Persons considered 'infidels', including those rejecting the insurgents' strict interpretation of Sharia

[Targeting, 3.1.3; Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.1]

Muslims opposing Boko Haram are considered 'infidels'. For Boko Haram, and especially JAS, Muslim religious leaders expressing disagreement with the group's methods, are a priority target. There are reports of attacks and destruction of mosques, and the killing of Muslim worshippers. There are indications that, since 2015, the group has attacked more mosques than churches; there is no clarity on the reasoning behind that change. Furthermore, recent attacks in 2020 by ISWAP suggest a shift away from their initial stance which was against targeting Muslim civilians.

d. Journalists

[Targeting, 3.1.9]

Nigerian media outlets reporting on Boko Haram have been attacked and threatened by Boko Haram. In practice, media outlets do not send reporters in the areas controlled by Boko Haram unless they volunteer; this is due to the lack of protection by the Nigerian security forces. A number of attacks and killings of media workers have also been reported in Kano and in Abuja.

e. Teachers and others working in education and children attending school

[Targeting, 3.1.5, 3.1.7; Security situation 2021, 1.3.2.1, 1.4.1.1]

Targeting of teachers and students is due to the group's opposition to western education. Since 2009 and until September 2017, Boko Haram is reported to have killed 2 259 teachers, and to have led to the displacement of 19 000, leaving almost 1 400 schools destroyed in the North-East of Nigeria. It has also attacked universities, including the Maiduguri University. School children were also particularly targeted. For example, in December 2020 more than 300 schoolboys and 80 female students were kidnapped and later released or rescued in Katsina state. The attacks were claimed by Boko Haram.

f. Health workers and humanitarian workers

[Targeting, 3.1.6; Security situation 2021, 1.6.1]

Boko Haram has openly condemned the use of western medicine, including vaccinations. A large number of healthcare facilities have been destroyed, in particular in Yobe and Borno. Health workers, especially those involved in immunisation campaigns, have been targeted and killed. Many health workers have fled the region. Boko Haram is also known to target humanitarian workers.

g. IDPs

[Targeting, 3.1.8; Security situation 2021, 1.6.1]

Attacks are also perpetrated on IDP camps, including by suicide bombings. There are indications that IDP or refugee sites are a direct target. This jeopardises the safety of displaced people, aid workers and military staff. Furthermore, since mid-2019, the Nigerian Armed Forces have introduced a strategy of concentrating their troops in what is known as ‘super camps’ and IDP camps within ‘garrison towns’, thus affecting the security and protection for IDPs or other civilians outside of these areas.

For the targeting of women and girls by Boko Haram, see Violence against women and girls by Boko Haram and treatment post-violence.

Risk analysis

The acts to which individuals under these sub-profiles could be exposed are of such severe nature that they would amount to persecution (e.g. killing, abduction).

Individuals targeted by Boko Haram would in general have a well-founded fear of persecution in the areas where the group has operational capacity. It should be noted that the activities of JAS and ISWAP concentrate in the North-East of the country, however, since 2019, Boko Haram’s activities have been extended into North-West region and in Niger state in North-Central region.

Nexus to a reason for persecution

Available information indicates that the persecution of this profile may be for reasons of (imputed) political opinion (e.g. those perceived as supporting the government or opposing Boko Haram, journalists, teachers, children, and especially girls, attending school, health workers) and/or religion (e.g. Christians, those seen as ‘infidels’).

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