

EXCERPTED FROM

Unmasking
Boko Haram:
Exploring
Global Jihad
in Nigeria

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgments</i>	vii
1 Boko Haram and Global Jihad	1
2 Nigerian Jihadists in Sudan and the Sahel	19
3 Al-Qaeda in Nigeria	47
4 Ideological Preparation for Jihad	65
5 Broken Alliances with Salafis	95
6 Mobilizing for Battle	123
7 The Role of al-Qaeda Affiliates	147
8 Factional Feuds and Territorial Conquests	169
9 Allegiance to the Islamic State	211
10 The Islamic State in West Africa Province	255
11 The Future of Global Jihad in Nigeria	319
<i>Appendixes</i>	
1 Nigerian Heads of State and Associated Key Events Since 1976	333
2 Boko Haram Leadership Time Line	335
<i>List of Acronyms</i>	337
<i>Glossary</i>	339
<i>Bibliography</i>	341
<i>Index</i>	401
<i>About the Book</i>	415

1

Boko Haram and Global Jihad

Global jihad in Nigeria was brought to the world's attention by Boko Haram's 2011 suicide car bombing at the UN building in the capital, Abuja. However, not until Boko Haram's self-proclaimed enslavement of schoolgirls from Chibok town in 2014 did the group and its victims generate widespread international reaction. Those reactions included disbelief about the abduction by Nigerian leaders in Abuja, expressions of sympathy about the girls' plight by the US president and first lady in Washington, DC, and praise for the "revival of slavery" by Islamic State (IS) leaders in Iraq and Syria.¹

By 2015, Boko Haram was ranked the world's most lethal terrorist group.² That same year IS formally declared it an affiliate, or *wilaya* (province), leading to its rebranding as Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Although still commonly referred to as Boko Haram, ISWAP's jihadists have since 2015 withstood attempts and undermined guarantees by the armies of Nigeria and neighboring countries to defeat them.³

After IS lost its "territorial caliphate" in Iraq and Syria to US-aligned military coalitions in 2019, ISWAP became increasingly important for sustaining IS's global project. The potentially catastrophic effects for Nigeria, Africa, and the international community of ISWAP's continuing as a hub for global jihadism⁴ revive questions that still require adequate answers.

Are previous explanations about why this Nigerian group emerged one year after the September 11, 2001 (9/11) attacks correct? What drove this group's embeddedness in global jihad and its becoming an IS province? And how did the group become so violent in such a short time? Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, where are ISWAP's own internal factions and its rival Nigerian jihadist groups—one aligned with al-Qaeda and another loyal to, but unrecognized by, IS—headed next? This book answers these questions and more.

Understanding Names

Boko Haram is an inaccurate moniker encompassing the formal names of several jihadist groups, including ISWAP, that originate from one Nigerian jihadist family. Understanding this moniker's genesis is important.

After the group's 2002 founding, media and villagers referred to group members at their camp based in Kanama, Yobe State, as the Taliban. The Kanama camp members welcomed being called the Taliban because the Afghan Taliban inspired them. However, camp members had no formal name for their group and usually called themselves mujahidin (jihadists), *muhajirun* (emigrants), or Kanama brothers.

After Nigerian security forces destroyed the Kanama camp in 2003, outsiders still called group members the Taliban. However, members began calling themselves Yusufiya (Muhammed Yusuf's followers), referring to the group sole leader from 2004 to 2009. Only in 2007 did the new moniker Boko Haram emerge, meaning "Western education is blasphemous." It was assigned by rival Muslim scholars and adopted by Nigeria's government and media to caricature Muhammed Yusuf's prohibiting Muslims from obtaining Western education in secular schools. However, Yusuf's *dawa* (preaching) was primarily about jihad, establishing an Islamic state, Nigerian and Western abuses of Muslims, and the illegitimacy of constitutional democracy. His *dawa* was only secondarily about *boko haram*.

Considering this moniker's prevalence, the etymology of *boko haram* requires explanation. Hausa dictionaries define *boko* as "fraudulence, sham, or inauthenticity"; linguists suggest *boko* only coincidentally resembles the English word *book* and is actually derived from Hausa's word for "magic," "deception," or "superstition": *boka*.⁵ Western education, according to Muhammed Yusuf and this definition, offers some benefits but is untrustworthy and should be accepted only when it does not contradict authentic Islamic knowledge. It is, therefore, untrue that Yusuf believed all Western education was *haram* ("blasphemous") or that books were prohibited. What was prohibited were *boko* teachings like Darwinism, English common law, or classical philosophy because they could lead to questioning the Quran, abandoning sharia (Islamic law) and atheism, as well as *boko* norms like mixed-gender education, singing the national anthem, and English-medium education because they undermined Islamic gender codes, the *shahada* (Islamic testimony of faith), and Arabic.

The group only announced a formal name after Nigerian security forces killed Muhammed Yusuf and Abubakar Shekau succeeded Yusuf in 2010. Shekau named the group Jamaat Ahlussunnah lid-Dawa wal-Jihad,⁶ which translates to Salafi Muslim Group for Preaching and Jihad. This name lacked convenient acronyms, and its length and Arabic origin made it difficult for non-native Arabic speakers in Nigeria and abroad to pronounce or remember it. Moreover, the name bestowed religious legitimacy, which

Shekau's Muslim rivals sought to challenge. Therefore, Nigerian Islamic scholars (*ulama*), journalists, and officials still labeled the group Boko Haram. Muhammed Yusuf's son, Abu Musab al-Barnawi (Abu Musab),⁷ however, asserted in an IS interview that "the name is a distortion by infidel media to tarnish the mujahidin's reputation. . . . We reject this name."⁸

The group known as Boko Haram was Nigeria's only jihadist group until another one announced its formation in 2012. Calling itself Jamaat Ansarul Muslimina Fi Biladis Sudan, which in Arabic means Group of Muslim Supporters in Black Africa,⁹ it was founded by former Boko Haram members who opposed Shekau and consulted with al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) before separating from their parent group. This group subsequently used an abbreviated name: Ansaru. Therefore, in 2012 Boko Haram was the larger group, and Ansaru was the smaller, but more tactically sophisticated, rival group.

In March 2015, Shekau pledged loyalty (*baya*) to IS caliph Abubakar al-Baghdadi after a courtship that started with the Chibok kidnapping. After al-Baghdadi accepted it, IS renamed Boko Haram the Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Boko Haram, or Jamaat Ahlussunnah lid-Dawa wal-Jihad, was superseded and became inactive. Ansaru still existed but was weakened by Shekau's retaliation against its members for defecting. Thus, in 2015 there were two Nigerian jihadist groups: Shekau-led ISWAP and Ansaru.

In August 2016, IS named Abu Musab as ISWAP leader and demoted Shekau, who announced he would not retract his loyalty to Abubakar al-Baghdadi but would reassume leadership of Boko Haram, or Jamaat Ahlussunnah lid-Dawa wal-Jihad. Thus, Shekau revived the group that had been inactive since March 2015. From August 2016 until this book went to press, ISWAP and Boko Haram, or Jamaat Ahlussunnah lid-Dawa wal-Jihad, were the two main Nigerian jihadist groups, but they both also operated in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. These two groups remained distinct from the third and smallest jihadist group, Ansaru.

Nevertheless, in Nigeria and abroad, governments, media, and scholars still refer to this entire jihadist family—Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansaru, and their predecessors—collectively as Boko Haram, as I also do in this book. However, Boko Haram will also specifically refer to the Nigerian jihadist community that existed from 1994 to 2002 and the groups that from 2002 until March 2015, and from August 2016 until the present, comprised the Taliban, Kanama brothers, Yusufiya, and Jamaat Ahlussunnah lid-Dawa wal-Jihad. ISWAP and Ansaru will also be called by their own names when discussed specifically.

One cautionary note is necessary. Boko Haram has evolved significantly, and individuals' associations with, and even support for, the early Boko Haram do not indicate support for Boko Haram after Muhammed Yusuf's 2009 death or atrocities committed thereafter, including the Chibok kidnapping.

Boko Haram in Nigeria

Any Boko Haram analysis requires an understanding of Nigeria. In an age when Islam and Christianity and the global north and south constantly intersect, few countries are worth examining more than Nigeria. With Nigeria's population expected to reach 200 million in the 2020s, its people comprise nearly one-fifth of all Africans. Nigeria is also home to more Muslims *and* more Christians than any other African country, with approximately ninety million adherents of each faith. The UN further forecasts that Nigeria will be the world's third most populous country, after India and China, by 2050.¹⁰

Nigeria is also a country of contradictions. One finds tech start-ups in the southern commercial hub, Lagos, which World Bank scholars predict will be the world's most populous city by 2100.¹¹ Yet in Lagos and other Nigerian cities, including Abuja, and countless villages, power outages and mobile phone network disruptions occur frequently. Nigeria also has more than two hundred ethnic groups united by English as their official language, which, like English common law, was inherited from Britain's colonization of Nigeria from the 1880s to 1960. However, Hausa is spoken ubiquitously throughout the majority Muslim north while Yoruba and Igbo are the most commonly spoken languages in the majority Christian south.

Nigeria's four neighbors, Niger, Chad, Cameroon, and Benin, use French as their *lingua franca* and have adopted France's concept of secularism (*laïcité*) in their legal systems. However, Hausa is spoken to varying degrees in each of those countries and especially in southern Niger. Nigeria's English-speaking elites regularly attend Western universities, but increasing numbers of Arabophone Nigerian Muslims have attended international Islamic universities in Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, and Malaysia. As this book demonstrates, Islamic theologies unknown in Nigeria were "imported" to the country by diaspora Nigerians, especially from Saudi Arabia and Sudan, who contributed to Boko Haram's genesis between 1994 and 2002.¹²

Boko Haram members are mostly Kanuri, which is a Muslim ethnolinguistic group based in the Lake Chad subregion, comprising around five million people in Nigeria's northeastern Yobe and Borno States. Yobe was part of Borno until Nigeria carved out six new states in 1991. Before the war with Boko Haram began ravaging northeastern Nigeria in 2010, Yobe was ranked among the poorest of Nigerian states while Borno, which benefited from cross-border trade with Niger, Chad, and Cameroon and access to Lake Chad's resources, was slightly above the national average.¹³ Both states' economies have been severely affected by the conflict.

Unbeknownst to those who consider Nigeria to be West African, the town of Gidimbari, Borno, where ISWAP killed 144 soldiers in a devastating attack in 2015, is located in Africa's geographic center.¹⁴ To Gidimbari's east is the

Map 1.1 Nigeria and the Lake Chad Subregion



larger town of Kukawa, with around 200,000 people. Like Gidimbari, it was largely under ISWAP's control as this book went to press.¹⁵ Kukawa was the final seat of the Kanuri-led Kanem-Bornu empire, whose 1893 fall, after one millennium of dynastic rule, to a Sudanese warrior supporting Sudan's anti-British *mahdi* (eschatological redeemer of Islam)¹⁶ and then to European powers is history neither Boko Haram nor the Kanuris are soon to forget.

Borno's northeastern tip along Lake Chad is closer to Libya's and Sudan's borders than Lagos. Therefore, Boko Haram's main operational areas in the Kanuri heartlands are no less Sahelian, Saharan, or Central African than West African. It should be unsurprising that several of Boko Haram's first leaders were in Sudan, where trading, pilgrimage, refugee routes, and British colonial programs historically connected Borno to areas near Sudan's capital, Khartoum. However, also notable is how Algerian jihadists contributed to Boko Haram's genesis and the group's evolution thereafter.

Another contradiction about Nigeria is its reputation as the "Giant of Africa" despite Boko Haram's time and again hitting above its weight class in battles against Nigeria's army. Nigeria and its allies, including the United States, envisioned Nigeria as West Africa's security guarantor. However, Nigeria has fallen short, and, contrarily, its neighbors have intervened on Nigerian territory to combat Boko Haram. The more Boko Haram requires Nigeria to expend military resources domestically, the less Nigeria can promote security abroad. As far as Nigeria's military power projection is concerned, it appears to have been dealt knockout blows.

Another contradiction is that despite Boko Haram's and ISWAP's loyalty to IS, neither group has pursued grisly killings of foreigners as a strategy even though thousands of expatriates work in Nigeria. Nor have ISWAP and Boko Haram launched campaigns to disrupt the vital southern Nigeria-based oil and gas sector, which has enabled Nigeria to become Africa's largest oil and gas producer and one of the top sources of US oil purchases. Threats specific to foreigners, including engineers, diplomats, and parishioners, in Nigeria and Cameroon, in fact, have primarily come from AQIM-trained Nigerians and Ansaru members who are expert in bomb-making and conducting kidnappings. Nevertheless, both ISWAP and Boko Haram have targeted international aid organizations' Nigerian employees, including men and women, Christians and Muslims.

Altogether Boko Haram's violence, the military's response, and civilians fleeing their homes in the crossfire have created unprecedented crises in Nigeria and the Lake Chad subregion. More than one decade of fighting has also wrought devastation for hundreds of thousands of displaced people, tens of thousands of lost lives, and untold numbers of destroyed schools, homes, medical clinics, government buildings, places of worship, livestock, and other properties. The conflict's epicenter—Borno—was once called the Home of Peace. Now it is the opposite, and there is no end in sight.

Studying Boko Haram

Whether Boko Haram is influenced by global jihadist trends and actors or local factors remains hotly debated and has led to different schools of thought.¹⁷ This book demonstrates that Boko Haram is rooted in a Borno-based Nigerian jihadist community whose leaders spent time abroad after 1994 and then attracted followers in Nigeria, especially after 9/11. This jihadist community subsequently merged with offshoots of Nigerian Salafi organizations, surfacing at Kanama camp in 2003.

Like virtually all Salafis, those in Nigeria adhere to Islam's largest branch, Sunni Islam, as opposed to Shia Islam, and engage in distinct religious practices. They strive, for example, to emulate the first three generations of Muslims from the seventh century (*al-salaf al-salih*), adopt literal approaches to scripture, reject innovations to Islam (*bida*), and show loyalty to Muslims (*al-wala*) while disavowing those opposing Islam (*al-bara*). Salafis in Nigeria and abroad may also declare *takfir* (excommunication) on Muslims promoting legal systems other than sharia and consider Salafi monotheism (*tawhid*) as pure but that of non-Salafi Muslims, Jews, Christians, and others as polytheistic (*shirk*).

Boko Haram and virtually all jihadist groups, including al-Qaeda and IS, are Salafi, but what distinguishes them ideologically from mainstream Salafis is that they additionally believe violent jihad (struggle) may be waged against those they deem to be Muslim apostates (*murtadun*), especially rulers (*taghut*), and non-Muslim infidels (*kuffar*). Thus, jihadist groups, including Boko Haram and AQIM's and al-Shabaab's predecessors, commonly emerge alongside, but then separate from, more moderate Salafi parent groups. Jihadist groups, including Boko Haram, also tend to fight and factionalize internally over ideological disagreements concerning who precisely are apostates and when it is lawful to kill apostates and infidels.

Although several Boko Haram founders were introduced to Salafi-jihadi ideology abroad, the group also evolved in response to national-level dynamics, including central Nigeria-based Muslim-Christian violence; northern Nigeria-based intra-Muslim, and especially intra-Salafi, rivalries; and crackdowns by Nigerian security forces in northeastern Nigeria. Additionally, exogenous shocks reverberated in Nigeria and affected Boko Haram's trajectory, including al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks, the US-led 2001 and 2003 invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, the France-led 2013 military intervention ousting jihadists from Mali, and Abubakar al-Baghdadi's 2014 caliphate declaration from Iraq. The ways these regional, national, and international forces produced the "Boko Haram phenomenon"¹⁸ are evaluated throughout this study. Also explored, however, are how memories of precolonial West African jihads were repackaged in contemporary frameworks and intertwined with the twenty-first-century global jihads of al-Qaeda and IS in Boko Haram narratives,

despite Middle Eastern jihadists' often racialized attitudes toward, and unfamiliarity with, Nigeria.

Proponents of the local school for interpreting Boko Haram attempt to "alienate Boko Haram from global jihadist movements," including al-Qaeda and IS, and "deconstruct the theory linking Boko Haram to the Salafi movement in Nigeria and beyond."¹⁹ They also prioritize secondary source literature and interviews with local officials and civilians over jihadist writings and statements.²⁰ This school is represented in works by Caitriona Dowd, Marc-Antoine Pérouse de Montclos, Alexander Thurston, and others.²¹ It further explains Boko Haram as a homegrown movement whose leaders pledged loyalty to an Iraqi, Abubakar al-Baghdadi, and al-Baghdadi's successor (in ISWAP's case), by arguing "there is no evidence of organizational links" with IS and the alliance with IS has been "good propaganda," "primarily rhetorical," and motivated by Boko Haram's "weakness."²² Pérouse de Montclos and Thurston also join Adam Higazi, Brandon Kendhammer, and Kyari Mohammed in reductively dismissing primary source-based evidence regarding AQIM's support of Boko Haram before the latter joined IS.²³ This study, in contrast, traces Boko Haram's evolution as a latecomer to, but rapidly rising group in, the global jihadist movement before it pledged loyalty to IS. This pledge resulted in IS providing military, financial, media, and strategic support to ISWAP and, perhaps most importantly, IS shaping ISWAP's leadership and transmitting its identity and organizational culture to ISWAP.

While the local school approach contributes important perspectives, there is a need to dig deeper, to provide a more carefully observed panoramic view, and to understand how international, national, regional, and local forces produced the Boko Haram phenomenon. This study departs from that school because previously overlooked and new evidence is introduced here regarding the Nigerian jihadists who founded Boko Haram and formed Kanama camp while maintaining organizational links to AQIM's predecessor groups and communication lines to Pakistan-based al-Qaeda Central. Boko Haram's 2002 founding was rooted less in local dynamics particular to northeastern Nigeria, or specifically Yobe and Borno, and more in Nigeria's post-1994 jihadist community's mobilization in response to triple effects from (1) al-Qaeda's post-9/11 call to global jihad; (2) allegations that Christians and Westerners were undermining Islam in Nigeria, compounded by pan-Islamism's assertion that Nigerian Muslims were under threat like their Muslim Afghan and Iraqi brothers; and (3) the failure of sharia implementation to meet Nigerian Salafis' expectations.

There is also compelling evidence that jihadism existed among Nigerian Salafis in 1994, if not earlier. This is one decade before Thurston alleges Muhammed Yusuf "tried to smuggle jihadist thought" into Nigeria's Salafi community.²⁴ Although jihadist thought was "imported" to Nigeria

by Nigerians returning from abroad and Algerian jihadists arriving in Nigeria, jihadism especially resonated in Nigeria after 9/11.²⁵ Jihadism and other forms of Muslim dissent, including the demand for an Islamic state governed by sharia to replace Nigeria's British-inherited political and legal systems, have since 9/11 been embodied in Boko Haram. What made Muhammed Yusuf exceptional was not pioneering jihadism in Nigeria, but being the *last* Nigerian Salafi preacher with a wide following still promoting jihadist thought by the time of his 2009 death.

This leads to another observation: rather than viewing Boko Haram through the lens of "locally grounded interactions between religion and politics," this study finds religion has become so fused with politics in Nigeria that Nigerian Salafis and Nigerian politicians mirror one another.²⁶ Boko Haram differs from Nigerian Salafi organizations because Boko Haram opposes politics altogether so long as the government does not fully adhere to sharia. The more accurate lens views Boko Haram *versus* the accommodation of religion, especially Islam, with Nigerian politics and the non-denominational and secular Nigerian state. This study also assesses Boko Haram's associations with Yobe and Borno politicians from 2002 to 2007 to have been more tactical and peripheral than the "alliance" that is asserted in other literature.²⁷

Saudi Arabia has also (1) provided Nigerian Salafi organizations with resources to expand since 1978, prior to Iran's Islamic Revolution; (2) incentivized Nigerian Salafis to remain loyal and connected to Saudi Arabia after the 1990–1991 Persian Gulf War; and (3) urged Salafis not only in Nigeria but also internationally to separate from jihadists after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and al-Qaeda's first large-scale attacks in Saudi Arabia that same year. These factors underscore "internationally grounded interactions" between religion and *geopolitics* in understanding why Boko Haram rebelled against Nigeria's government and its Salafi "collaborators." Nigeria's most prominent Muslims, including Salafis, today promote constitutional democracy, Western-style education, and cordial relations with Western countries and Christians. They are no less part of the Pax Americana world order than Boko Haram is the opposite.²⁸ And Boko Haram views those Salafis as apostates and enemies.

Lastly, another difference between this study and the local school is that Arabic and Hausa sources are introduced here that have rarely or often never been cited previously to assess Boko Haram's relationships with IS and al-Qaeda. These include correspondences from Boko Haram and AQIM leaders discussing jihad in Nigeria that were found in Osama bin Laden's Abbottabad, Pakistan, compound in 2011, including those in the CIA's final November 2017 release of all the compound's documents.²⁹ Other sources include Algerian AQIM officials' Arabic-language memoirs mentioning the 1994 jihadist expansion to Nigeria, mid-2000s French-language reports about Algerian

jihadists' cooperating with Nigerian jihadists from 1994 to 2004, declassified post-9/11 US government reports about al-Qaeda in the Sahel and Nigeria, and documents captured by US forces in Baghdad regarding post-9/11 financial transfers. This book also unearths Nigerian government correspondences to the UN revealing financial relationships between Nigerian Salafis, Islamic charity employees, AQIM's predecessors, and Boko Haram. These materials help piece together international, national, and regional dimensions of Boko Haram's 1994 origins, 2002 founding, and evolution thereafter.

Furthermore, archived social media accounts were reviewed dating from 2013, the year before Abubakar al-Baghdadi's caliphate declaration, to 2015, when Boko Haram pledged loyalty to IS. This was crucial to understanding how, why, and with whom Nigerian jihadists established communication lines to IS in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Sudan. Also evaluated are Kanuri- and Hausa-language audios from ISWAP's *shura* (consultative council), Arabic-language correspondences from Tunisia-based al-Qaeda and IS representatives to Boko Haram before its 2015 pledge to IS, and advice from a Syria-based Saudi IS theologian to ISWAP after the pledge.

This book's employment of exclusive attack data sets further assists in understanding Boko Haram's strategic shifts, especially its expansion from Borno to central Nigeria in 2011–2012 and its withdrawal from Borno's capital, Maiduguri, to rural Borno before conquering territory in 2013–2014. Additionally, through examining primary source documents this study unmaskes jihadist couriers who established lines for financing, training, and advising between ISWAP and IS's Libyan provinces in 2015–2016, and before then between Boko Haram and AQIM, al-Shabaab, and Bin Laden's deputies in al-Qaeda Central.

Although conducting research on Boko Haram and other clandestine violent nonstate organizations is like putting together puzzles without all the pieces, there is often unmistakable evidence that cannot be dismissed, pointing to events taking place behind the scenes, even when there is no hard evidence. Through judicious weighing of sources and trends, it is imperative to suggest probabilities of what evidence indicates, especially when astonishing or near-impossible coincidences otherwise exist, such as Boko Haram's first barracks raids just after Nigerian jihadists returned to Nigeria from Mali in 2013. This analysis, therefore, systematically presents new evidence and connects dots between events chronologically to identify "trigger mechanisms" affecting Boko Haram's trajectory.³⁰

This methodology emphasizes the importance of employing abductive reasoning when it is "not possible for the analyst to have access to all the facts that are necessary to come up with an explanation of some phenomenon," such as, for example, why Boko Haram specifically targeted churches with suicide car bombings in 2012 but not thereafter.³¹ This study, therefore, proposes most likely hypotheses and offers plausible explanations for phe-

nomena about which there is virtually no way of knowing facts with absolute certainty. Abductive reasoning is especially useful when encountering puzzling facts, anomalies, and inherently incomplete sets of observations.³² Deductive and inductive reasoning, in contrast, are ideal for researching less clandestine actors, such as market traders, about whom data can easily, safely, and repeatedly be tested. Markets and traders are, for example, much more accessible, or researchable, than Boko Haram's suicide bomb-makers and bomb-making workshops. Testing, according to abductive methodologies, compels researchers to iteratively produce data that justify *more plausible* hypotheses than preexisting ones or that make preexisting hypotheses more valid based on criteria such as evaluating a hypothesis's conciseness and reasonableness, reliability of evidence, internal consistency, and similarity with analogous events and paradigms.

One illustrative example of abductive reasoning in this book is the "curious circumstance" in which Boko Haram's Abu Musab-managed Twitter account initially neglected to mention the group's leader, Shekau (the premise).³³ By probing backward (*ab duco*), I hypothesized Shekau was injured and temporarily comatose, suddenly became camera shy, was whimsically forgotten about by Abu Musab, or his theology was disliked by Abu Musab. I justified that the latter (disliking Shekau's theology) was the most plausible hypothesis because it contained the most "probative force" based on contextual factors described in the book about Abu Musab's adversarial relationship with Shekau over theological matters.³⁴ There was, however, no guarantee this was the correct hypothesis because there was inherently incomplete evidence, including Abu Musab's inaccessibility for interviews.³⁵ Moreover, even if I braved visiting Abu Musab's camp to interview him, it still might be impossible to establish with absolute certainty his reasons for excluding Shekau from the Twitter account since people may lie, forget, or never be able to explain the psychology behind their actions in "past mental states" even when intending to be truthful.³⁶ Furthermore, Abu Musab's clandestineness would make replicating and corroborating the accuracy of my interview findings impossible for other scholars, unlike if I interviewed market traders.

Additionally, abductive reasoning requires recognizing any conclusion's *defeasibility* and remaining alert to new evidence or smoking guns emerging, such as internal Boko Haram medical records that hypothetically surfaced indicating Shekau was comatose in January 2015 when the Twitter account was launched. This could retroductively reveal that my hypothesis about Abu Musab's disliking Shekau's theology to explain Shekau's nonappearance on the Twitter account was less valid than other hypotheses.³⁷ Alternatively, newly arrested media team members' statements about Abu Musab's disallowing mention of Shekau on the Twitter account until Shekau agreed not to label Muslim civilians outside Boko Haram's territory as infidels and kill

them would boost my initial hypothesis and demonstrate its “scientific acumen.”³⁸ Since phenomena are rarely monocausal, competing hypotheses may simultaneously coexist. Abu Musab, for example, disliked Shekau’s theology, but I later found he also demanded Shekau agree to pledge loyalty to al-Baghdadi before he could appear on the Twitter account.

This and other analyses demonstrate how this methodology requires employing the three most fundamental skills in intelligence analysis: (1) subject matter, foreign language, and cultural *expertise* (corresponding to jihadism and Boko Haram, Arabic and Hausa, and Africa and Nigeria in this study); (2) *rigor* to transparently organize and present evidence; and (3) *creativity* to develop evidence-based explanations that have “not been thought about before” and presented in any literature.³⁹ This methodological approach helps overcome the “cyclical narratives” that have persisted in reports on Boko Haram since 2009 that have often not produced significant “new knowledge.”⁴⁰ While abductive reasoning has been mistaken for random speculation and derided by others studying Boko Haram, various fields do employ it, including law and detective work (as “informed speculation”), medicine, and natural sciences.⁴¹ In fact, part of the reason why local school proponents have not offered sufficient explanations for pivotal events such as Boko Haram’s 2012 suicide car bombing campaign, 2013 barracks raids in Borno, 2014 international kidnapping-for-ransom operations in Cameroon, 2015 opening of social media accounts, and 2016 barracks raids in Niger—and have overlooked regional and internal organizational factors triggering them—is not only their avoidance of primary sources but also their reliance upon approaches intended for studying nonclandestine actors like refugees, Salafi scholars, herders and farmers, or market traders. The tendency to halt analysis before hypotheses can be generated through employing abductive reasoning has resulted in pivotal events remaining unexplained.⁴² Crucial to employing abductive reasoning is recognizing that data about clandestine organizations can often be explained only through hypotheses measured from most-to-least plausible but not ascertained to the same degree of certitude as data about nonclandestine actors. However, abductive reasoning is not random speculation, and equating it as such can be likened to reducing quantitative research to bean counting.

Readers will also benefit from three exclusive interviews with the Kanama camp founder’s companion presented for the first time in this book. Kanama was the rural Yobe village near Nigeria’s border with Niger where the “Taliban” was based before Nigerian security forces destroyed Kanama camp in 2003. The companion described students from Borno and southern Nigeria traveling to Khartoum and those they met among Bin Laden’s deputies in Khartoum before forming Kanama camp.

I also interviewed self-described Ansaru associates and Nigerians who have communicated with Boko Haram and ISWAP leaders. This included

their mediations for releasing the Chibok schoolgirls conducted during my fieldwork in Borno and other Nigerian states as well as Niger, Chad, Cameroon, Mali, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Mauritania, Algeria, and Tunisia between 2014 and 2018. And while relationships between Boko Haram and other jihadist groups have been investigated from ideological, financial, and training angles, Boko Haram's military tactics are also assessed in this study and compared to AQIM, al-Shabaab, and IS to determine the extent to which Boko Haram's military improvements, especially suicide car bombings, barracks raids, international kidnappings for ransom, rocket-making, and up-arming sport-utility vehicles, were acquired or inspired locally, regionally, or even virtually through online communications. Finally, analysis is extended to other rarely explored domains, such as Boko Haram-related posts on websites of jihadist ideologues, including Abu Muhammed al-Maqdisi and Anwar al-Awlaki, Boko Haram's narratives, media branding, and platforms for messaging dissemination, and Boko Haram's *nasheeds* (Islamic hymns), which reveal intersections between local and international inspirations, identities, and influences.

Readers are encouraged to explore sources at this book's companion website: <https://unmaskingbokoharam.com>. Hyperlinks to interviews with the Kanama camp founder's companion, dozens of now-censored Boko Haram social media postings, and hundreds of other videos, audios, and written statements referenced in this book's endnotes and bibliography are found on the website. Primary sources were assessed for inclusion in this study according to three main criteria: (1) consistency with known facts and trends such that it was clear the source was not producing misinformation and intended to provide a factual account whether or not the source was leaked, captured, or intentionally published; (2) confirmation of the identity of the group or individual responsible for producing the source and of the source's authenticity; and (3) corroboration that the producer of the source could know details presented in the source firsthand or through close contacts. Potential biases of sources and jihadists' motivations for releasing previously clandestine information are also assessed in this study.

Archiving sources on this book's companion website is a response to growing demand for improving transparency in qualitative research by creating online appendices and digitizing sources when feasible.⁴³ It is also a response to censorship of jihadist materials on websites and social media platforms like YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook.⁴⁴ While deemed necessary for counterterrorism purposes, this has led to countless jihadist videos, statements, treatises, analyses, correspondences, *nasheeds*, Tweets, and Facebook postings being erased from the Internet and becoming irretrievable for researchers, and it has forced jihadists, including ISWAP, Boko Haram, and Ansaru, to shift to other less rigorously censored deep web platforms. Providing access especially to older Boko Haram materials on the companion

website will assist future researchers seeking to understand the genesis of, and resolve conflicts related to, jihadism in Nigeria and West Africa.

Structure of the Book

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 unmask the founders of Boko Haram and Ansaru whose common thread was meeting Bin Laden's deputies in Khartoum. Besides explaining how they arrived in Sudan and what they did upon returning to the Sahel and Nigeria, the chapter defines pan-Islamism, global jihadist movement, and al-Qaeda Central. The chapter further reviews AQIM predecessor groups' expansion from Algeria to Nigeria and their interactions with Salafi scholars. Diaspora contributions to Nigeria's jihadist community and AQIM predecessor's providing a haven for Nigerian jihadists after Kanama camp's fall are also discussed.

Chapter 3 examines relationships between Boko Haram and Pakistan-based al-Qaeda and the missions in the Sahel and Nigeria of two al-Qaeda envoys after 9/11. It also assesses al-Qaeda financing to Boko Haram and the role AQIM predecessors played intermediating between al-Qaeda and Boko Haram. Additionally, al-Qaeda strategy in Nigeria is analyzed based on court documents exclusively obtained for this research.

Chapter 4 explains how Saudi, Iranian, and Libyan geopolitical competition contributed to the formation of Nigerian Shia and Salafi organizations from which Muhammed Yusuf emerged and that challenged the religious authority of centuries-old Sufi orders. This chapter also begins a recurring discussion throughout the book about how Nigerian Shias' revolutionary discourses echoed in Boko Haram's pronouncements regarding the Nigerian state in a way that Salafi discourses did not. Boko Haram is also compared to northern Nigeria's Maitatsine movement, whose unorthodox *mahdism* factored into Yusuf's family history and left legacies rhyming with Yusuf's successor, Shekau. The impact of 9/11, Muslim-Christian violence, blasphemy cases, and sharia implementation on mobilizing Nigerian jihadists and their university-educated recruits to form Kanama camp is also covered.

Broken alliances are examined in Chapter 5, specifically between Nigerian Salafis and Muhammed Yusuf, and Yusuf and Nigeria's jihadist community. It assesses why leading Nigerian Salafi scholars supported the security forces' destruction of Kanama camp and why Saudi Arabia-based reconciliation attempts between Nigerian Salafis and Yusuf failed. It further explains how Yusuf reintegrated remnants of Nigeria's jihadist community into Boko Haram after 2004, the structure of the organization Yusuf built in Nigeria, how Yusuf and his followers concealed ties to AQIM, and why Nigerian Salafis could not undermine Yusuf's *dawa*.

Chapter 6 provides new details about Boko Haram's role in the assassination of prominent Nigerian Salafi scholar, Shaikh Jaafar Mahmud Adam. It

also discusses the preaching of Yusuf and his deputies, including their embrace of al-Qaeda tactics previously unseen in Nigeria, such as suicide bombings, before Boko Haram launched another uprising and Nigerian security forces backed by Nigerian Islamic scholars and politicians attempted to destroy Boko Haram again.

Revealed in Chapter 7 is how after Yusuf's 2009 death, Boko Haram allied with al-Qaeda affiliates. This involved coordinating trainings with AQIM and, to a lesser extent, al-Shabaab; reestablishing communication lines to al-Qaeda Central, including Bin Laden, through Algerian, Mauritanian, and Libyan intermediaries; and creating *nasheeds* about Abubakar Shekau and Boko Haram's creed (*aqida*). During this phase, Boko Haram exploited jihadist web forums and new media like Facebook and mobile phone text messaging to announce the impending jihad to global jihadist and northern Nigerian audiences.

Chapter 8 analyzes the impact of AQIM and al-Shabaab support to Boko Haram, AQIM's approval of Ansaru's separation from Boko Haram, and Ansaru's attempt to become both a global jihadist group and a central Nigeria-based militia defending Muslims during clashes with Christians. It also describes Ansaru's efforts to win Nigerian Salafi scholars' support and recruit locally in Nigeria and how Shekau eventually dismantled Ansaru and reincorporated elite cadres of former Ansaru, AQIM-trained, and Mali-based jihadists into Boko Haram before conquering territory in 2013. The role Algerian jihadist Mokhtar Belmokhtar⁴⁵ played in brokering Ansaru–Boko Haram reconciliation is also examined.

Virtual contacts between Boko Haram, Ansaru, and IS jihadist media activists are analyzed in Chapter 9. Also evaluated are Boko Haram's asymmetric responses to subregional military pressure, contradictions surrounding the group's deploying female suicide bombers,⁴⁶ fighters' ideological, financial, and revenge-based motivations for joining the group, and traffickers in Niger, Chad, and Cameroon and funders further abroad supporting Boko Haram. Also documented are Boko Haram's actual mediators, rogue jihadists falsely claiming to represent Boko Haram in negotiations, and Boko Haram's increasing brutalities in conquered territories, which compelled Abu Musab and other commanders to depose Shekau. This chapter further examines ethnic, regional, and linguistic fault lines in West African jihadism that contributed to Ansaru's and especially Boko Haram's distinctive evolution; compares Shekau to *mahdists* of generations past, especially Maitatsine; and explains why the Chibok kidnapping was the turning point on Boko Haram's path to becoming IS's West Africa Province.

Chapter 10 analyzes Boko Haram's pledge to IS, including Boko Haram's official Twitter account and videos promoting the pledge; reasons behind IS's August 2016 announcement of Abu Musab as leader; and ISWAP's March 2019 dethronement of Abu Musab. It further assesses IS

command and control over ISWAP, including its guidance regarding the “slavery” of Christian women; Abu Musab’s loyalties to IS and al-Qaeda; Nigerian jihadists’ experiences with IS in Libya; and ISWAP’s relationships with IS-loyal fighters operating in the Mali-Niger-Burkina Faso tri-border region who formally became part of ISWAP in March 2019. After profiling Boko Haram’s “global network” in Kano (Chapter 6), Shekau loyalists in Maiduguri (Chapter 7), *takfir*-prone cells in Kogi State and media activists online (Chapter 8), and recruits from Cameroon (Chapter 9), this chapter also profiles Chadian commanders. Finally, the chapter details ISWAP’s post-March 2019 internal factionalization, executions of Christians and aid workers, and responses to the Nigerian army’s “supercamps” strategy; Boko Haram’s post-March 2019 operations around Lake Chad; and ISWAP’s and Ansaru’s newly established cells in northwestern Nigeria. This leads to a final examination of whether Abubakar al-Baghdadi’s legacy has superseded that of Muhammed Yusuf among ISWAP’s and Boko Haram’s future leaders, especially child soldiers on the verge of becoming battle-ready.

While one can never know how lasting ISWAP’s alliance with IS will be and what evolution jihadists in Nigeria and the Lake Chad subregion will undergo in the future, Chapter 11 addresses challenges in negotiating with ISWAP and Boko Haram and undermining ISWAP’s theology and military capabilities. It also considers whether violence in pursuit of religious objectives is becoming obsolete for Nigerian Muslims, including Salafis, especially because of lessons learned from the Boko Haram experience. The chapter further highlights the paradox of combating a group like ISWAP, which is becoming more interconnected with global jihadists but is still embedded locally, especially around Lake Chad, and exists alongside, and in competition with, Boko Haram and Ansaru.

The strength of jihadist groups in Nigeria has ebbed and flowed, but ISWAP, Boko Haram, and Ansaru are nowhere near defeated. To understand their trajectory both ideologically and operationally at this time of transition in the jihadist politics of Nigeria, the Lake Chad subregion, and the Sahel, it is necessary to return to Nigerian jihadism’s somewhat distant origins in 1994. Let us begin by investigating how the travels, encounters, and transformations in the lives of Nigerians in Sudan that year engendered the Boko Haram phenomenon.

Notes

1. IS, *Dabiq* no. 4, 15.
2. Searcey and Santora, “Boko Haram Ranked Ahead.”
3. *Punch*, “Boko Haram Technically Defeated.”
4. For definitions of global jihadism, Salafi jihadism, Salafism, jihadism, Islamism, *takfirism*, and their variations, see Hegghammer, “Jihadi Salafis,” 244–266. On the jihadism-Islamism “rupture,” see Lahoud, *Jihadis’ Path*, 116, 155.
5. Newman, “Etymology.”

6. This book romanizes Arabic words, but uses the Arabic letter *ayn* (‘) when needed to distinguish a word’s meaning. Boko Haram spells its name in English as “Jama’atu Ahlis-Sunnah Lidda’awati Wal Jihad.” AQIM *shura* council member Abu Asim Hayyan was in an Algerian group of that same name from 1998 to 2004. See Hayyan, “Stations,” 4.
7. Real name: Habib Yusuf; *Al-Barnawi* means “from Borno.”
8. IS, *Al-Naba* no. 41, 8–9.
9. The group also used the acronym JAMBS.
10. UN Population Division, “World Population Prospects.”
11. Hoornwegg and Pope, “Population Predictions,” 199.
12. Pantami, “Theology and Jurisprudence,” 4.
13. NBS, “Poverty Profile for Nigeria,” 87.
14. Gidimbari can also be written as “Gudumbali.” Africa This Time, “Planning to Visit?”; Haruna, “Remembering Nigeria’s Fallen”; ISWAP, “The Outcome Is Best,” 2:12.
15. *The Nation*, “Boko Haram in Control.”
16. On *mahdism*, see Njeuma, “Adamawa and Mahdism.”
17. Zenn, “Primer.”
18. Brigaglia and Iocchi, “Some Advice,” 27.
19. Ibid.; Musa Ibrahim, “In Search of a Plausible Theory,” 25, 28.
20. K. Mohammed, “Origins of Boko Haram,” 589–590.
21. Dowd and Raleigh, “Myth of Global Islamic Terrorism”; Pérouse de Montclos, “Sectarian Jihad in Nigeria”; Thurston, *Boko Haram*. See also Seignobos, “Boko Haram and Lake Chad.”
22. K. Mohammed, “Origins of Boko Haram,” 599; Higazi, “Mobilisation,” 309; MacEachern, *Searching for Boko Haram*, 187; Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 268; ISWAP, “Part 2: Slay,” 18:00.
23. Higazi et al., “Response,” 210; K. Mohammed, “Origins of Boko Haram,” 584.
24. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 120; see also Lamido, “Book Review,” 6; Brigaglia, “Slicing Off the Tumour,” 218.
25. Pantami, “Theology and Jurisprudence,” 4.
26. Thurston, *Boko Haram*, 13.
27. Ibid., 123.
28. Brigaglia, “Popular Discourses,” 20.
29. CIA, “CIA Releases.”
30. US Government, “Tradecraft Primer,” 13, 22–24.
31. Swedberg, “Does Speculation Belong?” 12.
32. Walton, “Abductive,” 143, 151, 164; Gold, Walton, and Cureton, “Theorising and Practitioners in HRD,” 3.
33. Walton, “Abductive,” 144–145.
34. Ibid., 154.
35. Moore, “Critical Thinking,” 4.
36. Slobogin, *Proving*, 39–44.
37. Walton, “Abductive,” 145.
38. Swedberg, “Does Speculation Belong?” 13.
39. Cátedra Servicios de Inteligencia, “Randolph,” 2:30–4:16.
40. Kassim, Twitter, December 26, 2019; “New [production of] knowledge,” or “‘Mode 2’ knowledge,” is associated with abductive reasoning. See Gold, Walton, and Cureton, “Theorising and Practitioners in HRD,” 16.
41. Higazi et al., “Response,” 203; Walton, “Abductive,” 146; Slobogin, *Proving*, 39–57. See also Swedberg, “Does Speculation Belong?” 9 and Brigaglia, “Popular Discourses,” 11–14.
42. Swedberg, “Does Speculation Belong?” 9.
43. Boas, “Comment.”
44. Although Twitter is a “public space” and this study cites multiple jihadist Twitter accounts, Twitter accounts of journalists, academics, or researchers are generally cited only when Tweets (1) are of a public and academic nature, such as sharing one’s research findings; (2) reflect the account holder’s publicly stated views and have not been deleted; and (3) do not risk causing reputational or other harm to the account holder or anyone else.
45. Also known as Khalid Abu al-Abbas and Belouar (“One-Eyed”).
46. Some suicide bombers, both female and male, are involuntary; hence “suicide” is not the appropriate term in all cases.