



ACLED Methodology for Coding Boko Haram Factions

Boko Haram is currently comprised of two factions, each claiming affiliation with the Islamic State. Following Abubarku Shekau's rejection by Islamic State command in 2015, Abu Musab al-Barnawi – a top Shekau lieutenant – was appointed by Levant leadership ([BBC, 03 August 2016](#)). Shekau was declared illegitimate and in turn stated that Barnawi was attempting a coup against his authority ([The Sun, 17 July 2018](#)). Despite this, Shekau considers his branch Islamic State and continues to operate under the Islamic State mantle, albeit in name (Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah) only ([BBC, 16 July 2018](#)). The nomenclature is particularly problematic, as the Barwani faction is considered the main *splinter*, rather than the main group, and it is suspected that Barnawi's fighters have shown greater influence over the group as a whole over the past year ([Reuters, 30 April 2018](#)). **The reported intra-politics of Boko Haram are often times unreliable or contradictory.** Further, "Boko Haram is far from a unified movement, and there is a pattern of assassination within both factions" ([Campbell, 2019](#)).

Unfortunately, the majority of media in the region does not make a distinction between the two groups; rarely do media reports cite Shekau or Barnawi factions by name -- or factions at all -- when speaking of the groups unless it is notable to do so. Activities of the "official" Islamic State (Barnawi) faction are often reported simply as "Boko Haram," thus prompting many outside observers to not consider the existence of two distinct groups. The oversight of the group by IS is also contested.

Before the splintering of the group, all references to the group were attributed to *Boko Haram - Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah* by ACLED. Since the split, events are only attributed to the Barnawi faction -- identified as "*Boko Haram - Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah (Barnawi Faction)*" -- when source material specifically attribute an event to them. If the faction is not known, "*Boko Haram - Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah*" continues to be used as it was before the splintering. If reports attribute the event to Shekau's faction (i.e. the original group), this same original name ("*Boko Haram - Wilayat Gharb Ifriqiyyah*") is also used.¹ This is in line with ACLED's coding of the splintering of rebel groups in which the primary group continues to be coded systematically while splinter factions are designated by name.

ACLED is only able to identify actors based on information that is reported in the source material; in the majority of cases, ACLED is not able to attribute events involving Boko Haram to the specific faction responsible given the nature of reporting. As such, **it is**

¹ The name addresses Shekau's overall allegiance to IS, despite the current disagreements with its leadership and their recognition of him as leader.



important for users to remember that not all references to “*Boko Haram - Wilayah Gharb Ifriqiyyah*” are necessarily the original Shekau-led group specifically. This name refers to activity involving Boko Haram before the split and activity involving Boko Haram after the split where it is not known which faction specifically is responsible, while also reflecting cases in which activity is attributed to Shekau, the leader of the group prior to the splintering.