

World
Watch
Research

Nigeria: Full Country Dossier

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OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2024

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	12.8	96	98	96	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	10.6	93	92	91	92	92
3	Libya	15.9	16.0	15.9	16.1	16.4	10.2	91	88	91	92	90
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.8	89	89	88	88	87
5	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	89	88	87	85
6	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.5	14.9	14.4	16.7	88	88	87	85	80
7	Pakistan	13.2	13.9	15.0	15.1	13.1	16.7	87	86	87	88	88
8	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	13.3	87	83	79	79	85
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.8	16.5	10.9	86	86	85	86	85
10	Afghanistan	15.7	15.9	15.2	16.3	16.6	4.6	84	84	98	94	93
11	India	12.2	12.6	13.3	14.8	13.2	16.5	83	82	82	83	83
12	Syria	13.4	14.3	13.9	14.3	14.2	11.1	81	80	78	81	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.7	16.6	3.3	81	80	81	78	79
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	12.8	15.1	15.6	79	76	70	67	66
15	Algeria	14.4	14.1	11.5	14.0	15.6	9.8	79	73	71	70	73
16	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.0	14.8	13.9	7.8	79	76	78	82	76
17	Myanmar	12.2	10.6	13.4	13.7	13.0	16.1	79	80	79	74	73
18	Maldives	15.6	15.5	13.6	16.0	16.4	0.9	78	77	77	77	78
19	China	13.0	10.0	12.8	14.6	16.0	11.1	78	77	76	74	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	13.8	15.6	75	71	68	67	66
21	Laos	11.6	10.6	13.2	14.3	14.0	11.3	75	68	69	71	72
22	Cuba	13.2	8.7	13.8	13.3	15.1	8.7	73	70	66	62	52
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	1.3	72	72	70	71	68
24	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.7	12.8	14.4	5.4	71	69	69	67	66
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.9	12.6	15.5	1.7	71	71	71	71	73
26	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.5	10.8	10.4	14.1	71	69	68	67	63
27	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.9	70	70	68	62	60
28	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	70	68	66	68
29	Turkmenistan	14.2	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.5	0.6	70	70	69	70	70
30	Nicaragua	12.1	7.6	13.2	13.2	14.1	9.6	70	65	56	51	41
31	Oman	14.3	14.0	10.6	13.3	14.0	3.1	69	65	66	63	62
32	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	14.4	69	66	66	65	63
33	Tunisia	12.3	13.2	10.2	12.4	13.8	6.9	69	67	66	67	64
34	Colombia	11.1	8.6	12.9	11.3	10.4	14.1	68	71	68	67	62
35	Vietnam	11.3	9.4	12.4	13.8	14.2	7.2	68	70	71	72	72
36	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	12.4	14.1	14.3	2.2	68	66	67	64	61
37	Mexico	11.5	8.5	12.5	11.1	10.6	14.1	68	67	65	64	60
38	Egypt	12.5	13.7	11.4	11.9	10.9	7.8	68	68	71	75	76
39	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.0	68	68	65	63	43
40	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.6	67	68	74	67	66
41	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.9	67	67	66	64	56
42	Indonesia	10.9	12.3	11.5	10.2	9.7	11.5	66	68	68	63	60
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.0	13.1	15.9	66	65	65	64	60
44	Brunei	15.0	14.7	10.0	10.8	14.1	1.3	66	65	64	64	63
45	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.1	66	66	63	62	57
46	Tajikistan	13.8	12.6	12.3	12.9	13.4	0.6	66	66	65	66	65
47	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.8	12.1	12.8	14.3	1.1	65	65	64	64	64
48	Jordan	12.9	14.2	10.5	12.4	12.8	2.2	65	65	66	64	64
49	Malaysia	13.0	14.1	11.5	12.2	11.1	2.4	64	66	63	63	62
50	Turkey	13.0	11.5	11.6	13.2	11.4	3.1	64	66	65	69	63

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	12.4	63	64	63	62	61
52	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	14.4	62	63	61	58	55
53	Nepal	12.1	10.4	9.5	13.2	12.3	4.4	62	61	64	66	64
54	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	64	64	63	62
55	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	1.1	61	60	59	56	56
56	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	10.6	61	58	55	53	56
57	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.7	61	62	62	62	60
58	Sri Lanka	12.9	9.2	10.8	11.5	9.7	5.9	60	57	63	62	65
59	Azerbaijan	13.2	9.9	9.6	11.9	13.6	1.7	60	59	60	56	57
60	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	9.7	10.7	12.1	0.9	60	60	59	58	60
61	Kyrgyzstan	13.2	10.3	11.3	10.5	12.2	1.3	59	59	58	58	57
62	Russian Federation	12.7	7.7	10.6	12.8	12.9	1.7	58	57	56	57	60
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	9.4	58	57	50	42	42
64	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	12.8	57	55	52	48	48
65	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	1.1	55	55	57	56	55
66	Honduras	7.9	4.7	12.2	7.3	9.9	12.6	55	53	48	46	39
67	Venezuela	6.0	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	10.7	53	56	51	39	42
68	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	8.9	52	49	44	43	41
69	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	7.2	52	48	43	47	45
70	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	15.9	52	51	48	47	48
71	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	52	51	46	43
72	Lebanon	11.0	10.2	7.0	6.1	6.6	7.2	48	40	35	34	35
73	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	3.7	47	44	44	43	43
74	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.6	46	46	43	43	44
75	Belarus	9.6	3.8	5.8	9.7	13.3	3.3	46	43	33	30	28
76	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	44	42	42	42
77	Ukraine	5.5	4.8	8.0	11.6	11.6	2.8	44	37	37	34	33
78	Israel	9.8	8.6	5.8	6.3	6.9	6.7	44	38	41	40	38

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2024 reporting period was 1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023.
- The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.
- The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/> and on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom): <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>.

WWL 2024 Situation in brief / Nigeria

Brief country details

Nigeria: Population (UN estimate for 2023)	Christians	Chr%
222,182,000	102,988,000	46.4

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Map of country



Nigeria: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	88	6
WWL 2023	88	6
WWL 2022	87	7
WWL 2021	85	9
WWL 2020	80	12

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

Nigeria:	
Main Persecution engines	Main drivers
Islamic oppression	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Organized crime cartels or networks, Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.), Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Ethno-religious hostility	Ethnic group leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Organized crime cartels or networks, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Non-Christian religious leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Violent religious groups, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Organized crime cartels or networks, Ideological pressure groups, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Non-Christian religious leaders

Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of the persecution situation

In terms of Persecution engines, Christians suffer from a suffocating combination of *Islamic oppression*, *Ethno-religious hostility*, *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime*.

Nigeria has a history of enforced Islamization. Before the arrival of the British colonial administration in Nigeria, Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani radical Islamic scholar began an Islamic jihad in Gobir in 1804, and by 1808 had established the Sokoto Caliphate. He had vowed to enforce Islam through the power of the sword from the Sahara Desert in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the south. This enforced Islamization gained momentum with the declaration of Sharia states in northern Nigeria (starting in 1999). Since then it has gradually developed all over the country, by violent and non-violent means.

During the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari (2015 - 2023), violence from various Islamic groups increased. In addition to what already was happening, the government has been unable to prevent the increase of brutal acts of violence of which many Nigerians are victims, but most particularly Christians - with impunity. Most of this violence is in the North, in the form of attacks by Boko Haram, Boko Haram split-off Islamic State in West Africa Province - ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed 'bandits', but it has also spread to the South. Such violence often causes loss of life, physical injury, rape and other forms of sexual harassment, as well as loss of property and destruction of farmlands; abductions for ransom have increased considerably over recent years. As a result of the violence, Christians are being dispossessed of their land and means of

livelihood. Many live as IDPs or refugees.

Christians in northern Nigeria, especially in the Sharia states, face discrimination as second-class citizens. Christians with a Muslim background also face rejection from their own families, pressure to give up Christianity, and often physical violence.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

Nigeria has committed to respect and protect fundamental rights in the following international treaties:

1. [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights](#) (ICCPR)
2. [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights](#) (ICESCR)
3. [Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment](#) (CAT)
4. [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women](#) (CEDAW)
5. [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) (CRC)

Nigeria is not fulfilling its international obligations by regularly violating or failing to protect the following rights of Christians:

- The state is manifestly failing to protect Nigerian Christians' fundamental rights (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are murdered in indiscriminate attacks (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian women are raped, gangraped and sexually abused (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christian children are forced to adhere to Islamic religious precepts especially in the Northern states (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Converts to Christianity suffer from discrimination and violence especially in the Northern states (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 26)
- Christians are accused and charged with blasphemy especially in the Northern states (ICCPR Art. 19)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

The situation of basic rights violations in the 12 Sharia states could be characterized by 'submission into dhimmitude' (classical Islamic concept of second-class citizenship) and violence, although there are differences between the states. The 12 northern Sharia states are: Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Their Christian population totals 15% (12,589,490 Christians out of a population of 84,334,000). Apart from direct violence, Christians face all sorts of pressure in different areas of life. The various forms of pressure are indicated below in the section *Pressure in the 5 spheres of life*.

The situation of basic rights violations in the 7 remaining states (Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Taraba) is more or less comparable with the 12 Sharia states. [Please note that FCT (Abuja) is not classified as a state and is thus not included.] Their Christian population totals 50% (15,880,100 Christians out of a population of 31,515,000). The Christians in these states are also confronted with a mixture of violence and 'dhimmitude' in the Muslim-majority areas within these states. However, the emphasis is on violence, committed mainly by

armed Fulani herdsmen and 'bandits', although Boko Haram and ISWAP increasingly have their part in it too. It is also important to realize that both Boko Haram, ISWAP and armed Fulani herdsmen are frequently joined by fighters from neighboring countries.

Two examples of violent attacks on Christians:

- [10 March 2023](#): Gunmen entered the Karimbu-Kahugu community in Lere LGA, in the predominantly Christian area of southern Kaduna state. They proceeded directly to the home of Baptist pastor, Dadi Babas, where they fired shots into the ceiling, killing his son who was hiding there, and abducted his wife and three other people. (Source Punch NG, 11 March 2023)
- [2 April 2023](#) Palm Sunday: Gunmen burst into the Pentecostal church in Akenawe, Tswarev in Ukemberagya/Tswarev Council Ward of Logo LGA, Benue state, where they killed a young boy and abducted the church's leader, Pastor Gwadue Kwaghtyo, and three other worshippers. (Source: Daily Post, 3 April 2023)

Data on many more such attacks can be found on the website of The Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) which has published four reports relevant for the WWL 2024 reporting period:

- [October - December 2022](#)
- [January - March 2023](#)
- [April – June 2023](#)
- [July – September 2023](#)

Specific examples of positive developments

Positive developments listed in the WWL 2022 reporting period appeared less positive in the WWL 2023 and WWL 2024 reporting periods:

ICC inquiry into Nigeria

Former Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda of the International Criminal Court had called for a [formal inquiry](#) to begin into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Nigeria, in which she not only implicated non-state actors but also members of the Nigerian Security Forces. According to the prosecutor, the conflict had killed over 30,000 and displaced more than two million people (BBC News, 11 December 2020). The ICC's preliminary examination, which began in 2010, had then concluded that the "criteria for opening an investigation into the situation in Nigeria have been met".

Although this was a positive development towards some accountability, there were serious flaws in the Prosecutor's approach. The religious aspect of the crimes committed against Nigerian Christians was being downplayed and the crimes against them were being minimized.

More than one year later there has been no progress. Intentions of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) to organize themselves to put pressure on the ICC prosecutor yielded no tangible results. Although the prosecutor of the ICC visited President Buhari, it is not clear what the effects of that visit were ([WWR, 3 May 2022](#)).

Nigeria, Country of Particular Concern

Michael R. Pompeo, US Secretary of State, announced on 7 December 2020 that the USA designated [Nigeria](#) as Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998, as amended, for engaging in or tolerating “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom.” Although this news was welcomed with enthusiasm by many Nigerians, as it held hope that it would push the regime of President Buhari to improve their record on religious freedom, less than 1 year later (17 November 2021) the designation of Nigeria as Country of Particular Concern was [officially ended](#) (WWR, 24 November 2021). In the WWL 2024 reporting period, various national and international NGO's tried to push the US State Department to designate Nigeria again as Country of Particular Concern, but to no avail, despite the USCIRF 2023 recommendation (USCIRF 2023 Nigeria CPC).

New presidency

In February 2023, Bola Tinubu was elected as the new President of Nigeria. His election was controversial because he ran on a Muslim-Muslim ticket for the APC, which was unprecedented in Nigeria's recent history. Still there are signs that President Tinubu might want to ease the growing polarization in the country between its Christian and Muslim populations. As mentioned below (in: *Recent history*), President Tinubu made major reshuffle in various posts to establish a better balance between Muslim and Christian critical office holders. This could lead to more effective intervention by security forces on behalf of Christians and encourage a positive shift in recognition of religious freedom violations against Christians by the government.

External Links - Situation in brief

- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cescr.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/cat.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women - <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CEDAW.aspx>
- Summary of international obligations and rights violations: Convention on the Rights of the Child - <https://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 10 March 2023 - <https://punchng.com/kaduna-terrorists-kill-pastors-son-community-leader-laments-abductions/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 2 April 2023 - <https://dailypost.ng/2023/04/03/worshipper-gunned-down-pastor-others-abducted-as-kidnappers-invade-benue-church/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: October - December 2022 - <https://orfa.africa/october-2022-december-2022-nigeria-killings-and-abductions/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: January - March 2023 - <https://orfa.africa/january-march-2023-nigeria-killings-and-abductions/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: April – June 2023 - <https://orfa.africa/nigeria-killings-and-abductions-april-june-2023/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: July – September 2023 - <https://orfa.africa/nigeria-killings-and-abductions-july-september-2023/>

- Specific examples of positive developments: formal inquiry - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55277712>
- Specific examples of positive developments: WWR, 3 May 2022 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/nigeria-president-in-denial-as-experts-see-country-spinning-out-of-control/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Nigeria - <https://www.state.gov/united-states-takes-action-against-violators-of-religious-freedom-2/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: officially ended - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/nigeria-usa-new-cpc-listing-usa-is-playing-a-very-dangerous-game/>

WWL 2024: Keys to understanding / Nigeria

Links for general background information

Name	Quote Reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2022/23 country report – covering 156 countries	AI Nigeria 2022	https://www.amnesty.org/en/location/africa/west-and-central-africa/nigeria/report-nigeria/	26 June 2023
BBC News country profile - updated 28 July 2023	BBC Nigeria profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550	26 March 2024
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI Nigeria report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/NGA	26 June 2023
CIA World Factbook - Nigeria - update 20 June 2023	World Factbook Nigeria	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/	26 June 2023
Crisis24 country report (Garda World)	Crisis24 Nigeria report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/nigeria	26 June 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Nigeria profile 2023	EIU Nigeria profile 2023	https://country.eiu.com/nigeria	26 June 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2023 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2023 Nigeria	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	26 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index (covering 29 countries, Nigeria not included)	Democracy Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	26 June 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023 Nigeria	https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-world/2023	26 June 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2023 Nigeria	https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-net/2023	4 March 2024
Georgetown's Women, Peace and Security Index 2021/2022 – covering 170 countries	GIWPS 2021 Nigeria	https://giwps.georgetown.edu/country/nigeria/	26 June 2023
Girls Not Brides Nigeria report	Girls not Brides Nigeria	https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/learning-resources/child-marriage-atlas/regions-and-countries/nigeria/	26 June 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2023 Nigeria	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/nigeria	26 June 2023
Internet World Stats available in 2023	IWS 2023 Nigeria	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ng	26 June 2023
RSF's 2023 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2023 Nigeria	https://rsf.org/en/nigeria	26 June 2023
Transparency International's 2022 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022 Nigeria	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/nga	26 June 2023
UNDP: Human Development Report 2022 Nigeria – 191 countries/territories covered	UNDP HDR 2022 Nigeria	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data/#countries/NGA	26 June 2023
US State Department's 2022 International Religious Freedom Report Nigeria	IRFR 2022 Nigeria	https://www.state.gov/reports/2022-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nigeria/	26 June 2023
USCIRF 2023 country reports – covering 17 CPC / 11 SWL	USCIRF 2023 Nigeria	https://www.uscirf.gov/sites/default/files/2023-05/Nigeria.pdf	26 June 2023
World Bank Nigeria data (2021)	World Bank Nigeria data	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfileId=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=NGA	26 June 2023
World Bank Nigeria overview – updated 21 March 2024	World Bank Nigeria overview 2023	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview#1	26 March 2024
World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook October 2023	Macro Poverty Outlook 2023 Nigeria	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2fefc5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-nga.pdf	26 March 2024

Recent history

Nigeria, a country with the largest population in Africa and a major political and economic force in West Africa and the continent at large, is a legacy of British colonial rule. The area which is now called Nigeria used to be controlled by various small African kingdoms before the British colonial period. The conquest of what is now Nigeria started with the annexation of Lagos as a colony by the British Crown in the 1850s which led to the establishment of further colonies and protectorates in the region. After the amalgamation of these various colonies and protectorates in 1914, the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria came into existence.

Nigeria has a history of enforced Islamization. Before the arrival of the British colonial administration in Nigeria, Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani radical Islamic scholar began an Islamic jihad in Gobir in 1804, aiming to unite the Hausa kingdoms into one purified faith, under an Islamic Caliphate. Slavery, mutilations, kidnapping and beheading were his methods. By 1808 he had established the Sokoto Caliphate and vowed to enforce Islam through the power of the

sword from the Sahara Desert in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the south.

The arrival of British administration in 1903 effectively halted the push to spread Islam in the region that later became Nigeria. Frederick Lugard's establishment of the British Protectorates insisted on the end of jihad – and on the pre-eminence of British law. A deal was done: Local emirs might keep their positions, carrying out indirect rule, but the ways of jihad would halt. The spread of Islam was frozen.

Just short of sixty years later, at Independence in 1960, records kept by British officials revealed the political desires of some Northern emirs. One local leader – the Sarauta of Sokoto, Ahmadu Bello, himself a descendant of Usman dan Fodio – was particularly resistant to allowing Middle Belt Christians seats on the planned Executive Councils, and only reluctantly allowed representation of Christian minorities after significant political pressure.

(Source: Sharwood-Smith B, But Always As Friends - Northern Nigerian and the Cameroons 1921-1957, Duke University Press, 1969, pp. 237-239.)

In 1957, Ahmadu Bello, Premier of the Northern Region, made a speech in which he indicated his hopes to fulfil the ambition of his ancestor, dan Fodio: "We, the people of the North, will continue our stated intention to conquer the south and to dip the Koran in the Atlantic Ocean after the British leave our shores." Thus Ahmadu Bello did not hide his dream of Islamic expansion. In the 1960s, he forged a movement carrying out [religious conversions en masse](#) of polytheistic African worshippers in the Middle Belt (Walker A: Eat the Heart of the Infidel, 2018, p.118). At the World Islamic League Summit, 1964, he bragged he had converted 60,000 'infidels' in just five months. Under his Premiership, entry to the Northern Civil Service was conditional upon being 'Hausanized', presenting oneself as Muslim, and practicing Islam. He was explicit in his distaste for 'non-Hausa' civil servants.

And so, at Independence in 1960, Nigerians saw their freedom from British rule in different ways. Southerners saw freedom as self-determination, a throwing-off of colonialism. Many Northerners saw it as freedom to spread Islam once more, the freedom to live under sharia. It took until 1999 for the Northern states to achieve sharia law, and with this, Islamization once again gathered pace. Since then, through the imposition of sharia, through political and legal demands, through culture, censorship and patronage networks, it has gradually spread within Nigeria.

After gaining independence, Nigeria went through a series of civilian administrations which were overthrown by the army. After sixteen years of military rule by four different generals, in which transition to democracy and civilian rule were continually postponed, the Fourth Republic was inaugurated with a new constitution in 1999. Upon the sudden death of the military dictator General Sani Abacha, General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar oversaw a quick transition to civilian rule and promulgated the new constitution. However, according to a leading representative of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), "the 1999 Constitution mentions 'Shariah' 73 times, 'Grand Khadi' 54 times, 'Islam' 28 times and 'Muslims' 10 times but [does not mention](#) the words 'Christ', 'Christian', 'Christianity' or 'church' even once" (The Cable, 30 September 2017).

Since the resumption of constitutional rule in Nigeria in 1999, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) emerged as the dominant party winning all presidential elections except the 2015 and

2019 presidential elections. The country moved into a new chapter of history in May 2015 when Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat in the presidential election and passed power to the opposition, the All Progressive Congress (APC) with Muhammadu Buhari as president.

Over the past years, the country has been fighting an insurgency in parts of the Niger Delta region and Islamic militants in the northern parts of the country, which have spread to the South-West and South-East too. The administration of President Buhari [officially claimed](#) in February 2019 that Boko Haram had been defeated in military terms (Premium Times, 7 February 2019), with the Nigerian Army making the [same claim](#) one year earlier (Premium Times 4 February 2018). Nevertheless, Boko Haram still continues to be a menace to Nigerians particularly in the north-eastern part of the country, together with split-off group ISWAP since 2016. On 20 May 2021, ISWAP fighters [killed](#) rival Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in a fire-fight.

In the course of time the situation has become very complex in Nigeria's six political zones.

- Violence in the North-East was mainly perpetrated by Boko Haram, and after the split-off also by ISWAP.
- In the North-West there were the armed 'bandits'.
- In the North-Central there were the Fulani militants.

The circles of influence of these different groups have however increasingly overlapped, including their agendas. Boko Haram's Shekau, when still alive, was at least partly responsible for this. He had made a rigorous [shift in attitude](#) (HumAngle, 12 July 2020) and tried to forge alliances with various groups in northern Nigeria – such alliances included adherence to his radical Islamic agenda which was nothing less than to create chaos and have an 'Islamic state' in the North emerge from the ashes, presumably to be extended to the South too, and to parts of neighboring countries where Boko Haram and other groups are active. Many Boko Haram fighters have given up fighting, come out of their hiding places with their families and laid down their weapons. Indeed, Chief of Defense Staff, General Lucky Irabor made a public statement in March 2023, that "no fewer than [51,828 Boko Haram fighters](#) and their family members surrendered to the Federal Government between July 2021 and May 2022" (Vanguard, 26 March 2023). Despite this, the Islamist group is still alive and wreaking havoc in the country.

This has led to a devastating combination of violent incidents: Raids on predominantly Christian communities, sexual violence, road block killings etc. Abductions for ransom have increased considerably over recent years. Detailed research shows that this violence affects Christians in the country [disproportionally](#) (ORFA, Killings and Abductions in Nigeria, 24 February 2023). Apart from the outright violence, there are also many non-violent or 'squeeze' factors accompanying it, leading to intolerance and discrimination against Christians in their different spheres of life (such as education, employment, permission for building churches). At the same time, the failure of the federal government and several state governments to protect their citizens, is striking (notwithstanding the examples of certain courageous state governors who do their best to protect the citizens in their responsibility, sometimes in extremely difficult circumstances).

Violence is not limited to northern Nigeria alone but has spread to southern Nigeria too. In the three southern zones there is already violence being perpetrated by Fulani militants and 'bandits', including land-grabbing. According to a Nigerian analyst: "Eye-witnesses attested of

the heavy presence of the Fulani migrants in Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Rivers, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo. The common criminal activities in the Southern States of Nigeria are killings, kidnapping, invasions and occupations of forests, massive migration and loitering with fire arms."

A culture of violence and of impunity has been allowed to develop in Nigeria, encouraging all sorts of other criminal groups to flourish too. Sometimes it is difficult to see what is plain criminality and what has Islamic extremist connections. However, the lack of government intervention can easily appear to observers to be pro militant Fulanis and contra Christians (and other vulnerable groups).

The presidential election held on 25 February 2023

As reported by [BBC News on 1 March 2023](#): "Bola Tinubu, 70, has been declared the winner of Nigeria's most competitive election since the end of military rule in 1999. Widely credited with reshaping Nigeria's commercial hub Lagos, Mr Tinubu saw off a divided opposition party and a youth-backed third-party candidate". He was [sworn in](#) on 29 May (Al-Jazeera, 29 May 2023) and made changes to establish a better balance between Muslim and Christian critical office holders. According to The Insight on 13 June 2023, President Tinubu has said that one of his [priorities](#) will be to take decisive action against perpetrators of violence in the country. However, Tinubu's choice of Vice President was controversial to say the least: Kashima Shettima, a Fulani Northerner, former Governor of Borno State, is considered a security risk by many diplomats and intelligence experts and is widely seen as having been close to Boko Haram in the past. Nigeria's Constitution places Vice President Shettima as next in line for the presidency, should President Tinubu die in office. Consequently, President Tinubu's health is being closely watched.

President Tinubu's Muslim-Muslim ticket broke the convention that a southern Muslim presidential candidate would be expected to run with a northern Christian as potential vice-president and vice versa. In this respect, it is to be feared that a precedent has been set. Indeed, the outspoken ex-Governor of Kaduna State, Nasir el-Rufai, suggested in a series of speeches that there was now [no longer any need](#) for Muslim politicians to respect political conventions of 'balancing' election tickets, or appointing minority religions to posts. He declared that Nigeria was now beginning 20 years of Islamic rule, that this would deliver 'Islamic justice' and that only under Islamic rule would Christians have their rights protected (This Day, 11 June 2023). Such deepening of religious divisions could have developed into a major threat for Tinubu's first months in office.

President Buhari's federal government had appointed mostly northern Muslims to certain critical offices, including security agencies like the army, air force, police, immigration service, the Department of State Services (DSS), customs, Civil Defence Corps, prison service etc. The same applied increasingly for the judiciary in Nigeria, and for key economic sectors. A Nigerian analyst referred to this as "ethno-religious incursion of the establishment". The challenge in all this was the increasing and systematic denial of religious freedom violations against Christians by the government. After the elections in February 2023, and his inauguration in May 2023, President Tinubu replaced security chiefs (and other services) in a [major reshuffle](#), establishing a better balance between Muslim and Christian critical office holders (Al-Jazeera, 20 June 2023).

This might cause a positive shift in recognition by the government of religious freedom violations against Christians, and more importantly, more effective intervention by security forces on behalf of Christians. However, the proof, even if only preliminary, has yet to be provided.

Political and legal landscape

Ethnicity and religion play a significant role in Nigerian politics. Politicians try to mobilize support directly and indirectly by appealing to ethnic and religious sentiments. Historically, the Muslim Hausa-Fulani politicians have dominated the political field, especially due to their dominance in the army which has always been a significant player in Nigerian politics. The major bone of contention in Nigerian politics is the distribution of revenue derived from the country's considerable oil resources. Corruption is rampant, both at state and federal level.

Political landscape in Tinubu's first year as president

Among President Tinubu's first major steps was a series of appointments winning praise for their embrace of [religious and ethnic balance](#) in senior leadership positions (Daily Post 20 June 2023). The new president also embraced a free market approach, styling himself 'Nigeria's Top Salesman' and 'Nigeria's Marketing Officer,' in an appeal to the entrepreneurial spirit of Nigerians. However, severe challenges in the economy and security require major reform, and in his first year he has taken steps towards these. For instance, he scrapped Nigeria's fuel subsidy, pointing out the national cost of subsidizing cheap fuel nationwide. Inevitably, Nigeria's labor unions reacted furiously, announcing nationwide strikes which were averted by the [announcement](#) of a six month increase to the minimum wage in response (BBC News, 1 October 2023). Further, the government's monetary policy has been transformed: The CBN governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria was replaced, fixed exchange rates were abandoned and the currency markets were subsequently allowed to determine the value of the naira, causing the value of the naira to fall dramatically. As a result, fuel scarcity, fuel inflation, food inflation, and a devalued currency are hurting working people.

In a security shake-up, the chiefs of customs, police, army, navy and air force were replaced in an attempt for the security establishment to deliver better results in confronting the perpetrators of violence attacking civilians and the state. Perhaps Tinubu's biggest success so far is to exert control over government. Radical forces distrust him and would like to destabilize him: so far, they have been held in check.

Legal landscape

In the WWL 2024 reporting period, a significant cause for concern was the '[Bill to Establish the National Council for Christian Education](#),' currently in the National Assembly having passed second reading. The bill seeks stricter regulation of Christian schools, and although supported by the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), it has been rejected by other church leaders, including the Catholic Bishops Conference of Nigeria (ICIR, 1 July 2023). Christian lawyers have spoken out against the bill and a large number of civic society groups are alarmed by the state's proposed [interference in freedom of worship](#) (The Guardian Nigeria, 16 June 2023). It is not hard to see how laws to 'regulate Christianity' might be abused in the Nigerian setting.

A second alarming precedent during the WWL 2024 reporting period was a Northern state government using the Cybercrimes Act to [accuse a Christian nurse of blasphemy](#) (ADF UK Press release, 23 November 2023). Rhoda Jatau, a Christian nurse, shared a video clip condemning the killers who lynched student Deborah Yakubu for alleged blasphemy in 2022; this was enough to have herself accused of blasphemy by colleagues who saw the clip. A rioting mob descended on Jatau's home in Bauchi state which resulted in the state holding her in custody for 19 months without trial. Charged under 'Inciting Public Disturbance, Insulting and exciting Contempt of a Religious Creed and Cyber-Stalking,' under the Bauchi Penal Code, the state police stoked the popular street accusation of blasphemy. Christians – who cannot be tried under Sharía law – have never been pursued in civil courts for blasphemy before. At the introduction of sharía law in 1999, supporters of Sharía argued that Christian minorities had nothing to fear, since parallel civil legal systems would apply to Christians, and that the harsher penalties of sharia would not be enacted, because they would be illegal under Nigeria's Constitution. However, the assumption that the Nigerian Constitution would take precedence where the two legal systems came into conflict, has proved incorrect. It would seem that the Bauchi State government has used the accusation of blasphemy as a political furthering of sharia into the public space. International political pressure achieved bail conditions for Rhoda Jatau and she and her family remain in hiding. There has been no examination of the motivations of the police prosecution.

On 7 August 2020, the then president, Muhammadu Buhari, signed the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020 ([CAMA, 2020](#)) into law. The enactment of CAMA 2020 generated a lot of controversy particularly with the provisions of Section 839 which allows the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) to take over institutions registered under the Incorporated Trustee Provisions of the Act. Several Christian denominations publicly expressed reservations since the provisions are being seen as a move to ensure government control of churches and a move to restrict Freedom of Worship as provided in Section 38 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (amended in 2011). The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) firmly [rejected the law](#) (AciAfrica, 21 August 2020), and have fought against it at the political and legal level successfully. In March 2023, CAN issued the following communication: "Today at Federal High Court, ... we have secured judgment in favor of Christianity in Nigeria to the effect that ... the CAC no longer has the power to interfere, take over or close down any Church or Christian Body in Nigeria for any reason whatsoever."

Gender perspective

The Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015 is Nigeria's first criminal legislation that recognizes a broad spectrum of violence - sexual, economic, physical, and psychological abuse - particularly against women and girls but is yet to be adopted by several sharia-run northern states ([Partners West Africa Nigeria, VAPP Tracker, accessed April 2023](#)). Domestic violence within marriages is widespread; in the Islamic northern region, husbands are permitted to discipline their wives so long as no 'grievous' bodily harm is caused (CEDAW 2017), and in the South, the Criminal Code Act considers assault on a woman as a 'misdemeanor' as opposed to a 'felony' if the victim were a man. Nigeria also ratified the CEDAW Convention in 1985 and the Optional Protocol in 2004, but was criticized in a [2017 NGO Coalition Shadow Report](#) for tacitly permitting child marriage; the report called for an overhaul of national legislation to ensure

CEDAW is adequately integrated throughout laws and policies (NGO Coalition Shadow Report, June 2017, “Report of Nigeria on Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women”).

Three marital regimes (civil, customary and Islamic) operate concurrently and lack uniformity. The federal government has no jurisdiction over Islamic or customary marriages and as such early marriage and polygamy are widespread. Furthermore, marital laws are particularly confining for women and girls in the North and Nigeria’s plural legal system on marriage makes Christian girls vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. This is true especially in the context of sharia law, where girls are regularly abducted by Muslim fellow-citizens, brought, for example, to the [Emir of Gashua’s palace](#) (Yobe state), and forced into marriage with Muslims (Daily Post, 6 November 2017).

In this environment, it is useful to note that, as of 2021, just [3.6%](#) of seats in national parliament were held by women (Index Mundi, accessed 1 August 2022).

Religious landscape

Nigeria: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	102,988,000	46.4
Muslim	103,464,000	46.6
Hindu	39,700	0.0
Buddhist	11,600	0.0
Ethno-religionist	14,971,000	6.7
Jewish	1,200	0.0
Bahai	52,600	0.0
Atheist	58,700	0.0
Agnostic	567,000	0.3
Other	28,400	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Religion plays a pivotal role in Nigerian society. According to WCD 2023 estimates, 46.6% of the population is Muslim, while 46.4% is Christian. Although there is a religious fault-line between northern and southern Nigeria, the situation is not as clear-cut as it first appears. There are many Christians in the north and many Muslims are living in the south. The combined total of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is 93% of the population. The 6.7% Ethno-religionists are spread throughout the country.

The Christian population in the six geopolitical zones (see above: *Map of Country*)

- **NORTH-WEST:** These 7 states (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara) have 7,022,590 Christians (12%) out of a population of 56,197,000.
- **NORTH-CENTRAL:** These 6 states (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau) and FCT (Abuja) have 17,001,400 Christians (51%) out of a population of 33,588,000.
- **NORTH-EAST:** These 6 states (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe) have 6,491,600 Christians (22%) out of a population of 30,156,000.
- **SOUTH-WEST:** These 6 states (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo) have 28,898,950 Christians (66%) out of a population of 43,928,000.
- **SOUTH-SOUTH:** These 6 states (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers) have 23,695,580 Christians (72%) out of a population of 33,103,000.
- **SOUTH-EAST:** These 5 states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo) have 19,484,840 Christians (77%) out of a population of 25,210,000.

The data listed above (based on WCD research accessed March 2023) implies that religious and ethno-religious tensions can easily become a nationwide issue, as is currently happening.

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Nigeria):

- "There are Jewish communities in Abuja and Lagos led by the Chabad Lubavitch movement and comprised mostly of foreign residents. A larger community of Nigerian Jews – dividing themselves among Messianic, Sabbatarian, Community of Hashem, and Orthodox congregations – is present primarily in the South East and South South regions of the country."
- "On December 4 [2022], the Chabad Lubavitch movement officially opened its Ohel Penina facility in Abuja, which it called the 'first synagogue in Nigeria'. Local Jews noted the presence of other synagogues in the country, however."
- "In its most recent detailed surveys in 2010 and 2012, Pew found 38 percent of Muslims self-identify as Sunni, most of whom belong to the Maliki school of jurisprudence, although a sizable minority follows the Shafi'i school of *fiqh*. This corresponds to the 37 percent of Muslims who identify either with Sufism, of which the largest brotherhoods are the Tijaniyyah (19 percent) and Qadriyyah (9 percent), or Salafism, known in the country as Izala. The same studies found 12 percent of Muslims self-identify as Shia, with the remainder declining to answer or identifying as 'something else' (5 percent) or 'just a Muslim' (42 percent). There are also small numbers of Mouride Sufis, as well as Ahmadiyya and Kala Kato (Quraniyoon) Muslims."
- "Ahmadi Muslims maintain a small presence in several cities, including Lagos and Abuja."
- "The Shia Muslim presence is heavily concentrated in the North West region."

Economic landscape

Nigeria is Sub-Saharan Africa's largest economy. At present, it relies heavily on oil as its main source of revenue and has the largest natural gas reserves on the continent. Efforts to diversify economic activities are limited by poverty and corruption (Crisis24, Nigeria Country Report). Nigeria is Africa's biggest oil exporter.

According to the World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Nigeria (October 2023):

- **Economic growth:** "After growing by 3.6 percent in 2021, GDP growth slowed to 3.3 percent in 2022 and further to 2.4 percent year-on-year (y-o-y) in H1 2023. The deceleration was driven by the continued weakness in oil production, lower agriculture output stemming from the sustained impact of severe floods in Q3 2022, and a disruptive and costly demonetization policy, which adversely impacted the non-oil industrial and service sectors. ... [T]he economy is expected to grow at an average of 3.4 percent in 2023-2025, higher than the past average of 1.4 percent in 2015-2022 and the estimated population growth, driven by services, trade, construction, and agriculture."

According to the World Bank Nigeria overview:

- **Inflation:** "Weakened economic fundamentals led the country's inflation to reach a 24-years high of 31.7% in February 2024, which, in combination with sluggish growth, has pushed millions of Nigerians into poverty."
- **Poverty:** "The poverty rate is estimated to have reached 38.9% in 2023, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line — the world's second-largest poor population after India."

Due to the serious security situation, the violent attacks on or intimidation of farmers in many parts of Nigeria, the fear of abduction (not only in the villages but also along the roads), the impunity for violence against Christians, and the absolute lack of compensation by the government for damage suffered, have handicapped farming activities and caused serious economic damage. Many Nigerians have been affected by this, but Christians in particular.

Islamic banking started in Nigeria in 2012. Many Christians look at Islamic banking with suspicion. Whether the suspicion is founded, remains to be seen. A Christian lawyer in a predominantly Islamic commercial city explained that he is worried about Islamic banking not because it is Islamic but because of background packages such as the *Mudarabah*. This allows a client to transfer money for subsequent project or investment and is a recipe for all kinds of funding, including whatever form of jihad is acceptable to the customer. That constitutes a serious setback in any fight against the funding of terrorist activities.

In the field of business and human rights: Shell's Nigerian subsidiary was declared liable for the consequences of two oil spills in Nigeria, according to a [ruling](#) of the Court of Appeal of The Hague on 29 January 2021 (Rechtspraak, 29 January 2021).

Gender perspective

Women are - in general - more economically vulnerable than men, due to gender gaps in regards to education and labor force participation rates (UNDP HDR Nigeria). Patrilineal inheritance practices and harmful practices against widows make it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence.

Social and cultural landscape

Nigeria accounts for about half of West Africa's population and one of the largest populations of youth in the world. According to [World Population Review](#), accessed 4 March 2024:

- "Nigeria has the largest population in Africa. The United Nations project that the overall population of Nigeria will reach about 401.31 million by the end of the year 2050. By 2100, if current figures continue, the population of Nigeria will be over 728 million. According to the Census Bureau of the United States, the population of Nigeria will surpass that of the United States in 2047, when the population of Nigeria will reach 379.25 million. With those numbers, Nigeria will become the third most populated country in the world. The major contributors to Nigeria's population growth are early marriages [and] high birth rates ... The birth rate in Nigeria is about 37 births per 1,000 people."

According to the World Factbook Nigeria:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hausa 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo (Ibo) 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/Berberi 2.4%, Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw/Izon 1.8%, other 24.7% (2018 est.)
- **Main languages:** English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, over 500 additional indigenous languages
- **Urban population:** 54.3% of total population
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.92%
- **Median age: 18.6 years**
- **Literacy rate (adult, ages 15 and older):** 62.0% (female: 52.7%; male: 71.3%)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 10 years (female: 9.4 years; male: 10.6 years)
- **Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24):** 19.6% (female: 19.4%; male: 19.8%)
- **Population below poverty line:** 40.1% (2018 estimate)

According to World Bank Nigeria data (2021):

- **Population growth:** 2.4%
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 53 years

According to [UNICEF Nigeria](#) (accessed 6 July 2023):

- **Education:**
 - "In Nigeria, about 10.5 million children are not in school even though primary education is officially free and compulsory."
 - "One in every five of the world's out-of-school children is in Nigeria."

- "Only 61 percent of 6-11 year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6 percent of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education. In the north of the country, the picture is even bleaker, with a net attendance rate of 53 percent.
- "States in the north-east and north-west have female primary net attendance rates of 47.7 percent and 47.3 percent, respectively, meaning that more than half of the girls are not in school. The education deprivation in northern Nigeria is driven by various factors, including economic barriers and socio-cultural norms and practices that discourage attendance in formal education, especially for girls."

The mass shutdown of schools and places of higher education in Northern Nigeria was described by one commentator as 'shattering the future of this country.' According to EDUGIST, reporting on 4 February 2024, more than [10,000 schools had been closed down](#) in Northern Nigeria due to the current insecurity, consigning millions of children to illiteracy, early marriage and poverty. The combination of high numbers of children and youth, a lack of education and employment opportunities and high levels of poverty will make recruitment for violent Islamic militancy easier, and given the atmosphere of high levels of impunity, turn the country into a 'powder keg', ready to explode. The resulting chaos and conflict will be the perfect breeding ground for making Nigeria as Sharia nation.

Teachers are just as vulnerable as students and are also a target for attack. According to a report by Arise News on 2 October 2022: "The Registrar/Chief Executive of Teachers' Registration Council of Nigeria (TRCN), Professor Josiah Ajiboye, has disclosed that attacks on schools by [insurgents claimed the lives of more than 2,295 teachers](#) in the North-East between 2009 and 2022. Ajiboye ... ,also revealed that over 19,000 others were displaced, with over 910 schools destroyed due to the conflict."

According to the [UNHCR Country data](#) - last updated 31 December 2023:

- **IDPs:** 3,485,827 (especially located in parts of North-East, North-Central and also in North-West Nigeria).
- **Refugees:** 69,860, the vast majority from Cameroon (64,731, as of 31 January 2024 - [UNHCR Cameroonian Refugees Overview](#)).

According to an [OCHA Situation Report](#) on 22 February 2024: 26.5 million Nigerians projected to be food insecure in 2024.

According to UNDP HDR Nigeria profile:

- **HDI score and ranking (2021):** "Nigeria's HDI value for 2021 is 0.535— which put the country in the Low human development category—positioning it at 163 out of 191 countries and territories."
- **Gender inequality (2021):** "The 2021 female HDI value for Nigeria is 0.495 in contrast with 0.574 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.863, placing it into Group 5. ... Nigeria has a GII value of 0.680, ranking it 168 out of 170 countries in 2021."

In this socio-cultural setting, the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity is harshest. While in the sharia states all Christians can be confronted with education and employment

difficulties, converts often have to flee for fear of their lives, and leave everything behind.

Gender perspective

Whilst education rates are low across the board, girls in particular are discouraged from attending school, both due to economic and socio-cultural factors ([UNICEF Press Release](#), 14 April 2022). According to a 2017 [UNICEF](#) report, girls are 6% less likely to attend secondary school than boys (UNICEF, 2017, “Impact Evaluation of UNICEF Nigeria”, p.4). This is in part due to high rates of early marriage and teenage pregnancy; 43% of girls are married before their eighteenth birthday, and 16% before their 15th birthday (Girls Not Brides Nigeria). Some parents, fearful that their Christian daughter might be attacked - particularly in Sharia states - choose to keep them at home or have them marry early in order to protect them.

Patriarchal norms are particularly prevalent in northern Nigeria, where women are widely considered to be second class citizens. According to a [2017 CEDAW](#) report (NGO Coalition Shadow Report, 2017, p.12), persisting discriminatory stereotypes about the roles of men and women in the family unit contributes to the high rates of early and forced marriages. Victims of sexual assault and rape, already deeply traumatized, often face stigma from their families and communities ([International Alert, May 2020](#)). Christian women and girls abducted and impregnated by Boko Haram for example, are viewed as being tarnished and they struggle to integrate upon return – their babies are viewed as ‘Boko’ babies and their husbands struggle to accept what has happened. This can lead to the breakdown of Christian families and communities.

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2023)

- **Internet usage:** 67.5% penetration - survey date: December 2021 (most recent survey at time of writing)
- **Facebook usage:** 16.1% penetration – survey date: January 2022
According to [Napoleon Cat \(February 2024\)](#), 57.4% of Facebook users are male, in comparison to 42.6% female users.

According to World Bank Nigeria data (2021):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 91.4 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2023 Nigeria:

- Nigeria is categorized as 'partly free' with a score of 60 points out of 100.
- "Internet freedom improved in Nigeria, as internet connectivity increased and social media platforms remained accessible throughout the 2023 presidential and gubernatorial elections. However, mis- and disinformation coordinated by state-affiliated groups and powerful political actors undermined the credibility of online information and contributed to an increase in tensions between ethnic groups during the election period. A new code that requires platforms to take down unlawful content within 48 hours could incentivize companies to remove legitimate political expression."

- "Journalists and ordinary users face criminal charges for posting content criticizing powerful individuals, and online journalists continue to be subjected to harassment, intimidation, and violence."

According to a report by the [Media Foundation for West Africa](#) (MFWA) on 22 August 2022, the Nigerian government took 52 radio stations off air thus preventing them from broadcasting in the critical months leading up to the 2023 elections. The authorities justified their action by stating that the stations had been late in paying their broadcasting licenses.

In the context of Nigeria, significant government control over social media and related Internet services is liable to affect Christians seriously. Being such a threatened group in Nigeria, Christians depend on the Internet to make widely known what they are experiencing. This is very important for them and others interested in their plight, to keep questioning how the rule of law is functioning in the country. This is particularly the case when the attitude of the Federal and state authorities sometimes raises doubt about their willingness to protect their Christian citizens.

Security situation

Over the years, violence from many different non-state actors in Nigeria has grown, leading to a very high degree of insecurity. Nigeria has developed a 'culture of violence'. The failure of the federal and state authorities to turn the tide has certainly contributed to it. There are many reasons behind this but WWR sees as a main guiding principle oppressive policies and actions which are part of the push towards the Islamization of Nigeria. Not only Christians but also many Muslims and other Nigerians are victims of this process. In WWL terminology, this is called *Islamic oppression*. It is however combined with *Ethno-religious hostility* because militants from the Fulani ethnic group appear to be at the core of the Islamization process.

The Islamist expansionist agenda is occurring against the background of environmental degradation and population growth, pushing the mainly Muslim Fulani herdsmen with their cattle southwards to the North-Central and to the southern zones. The stress this is causing on herder-farmer relationships - a classical theme in the history of mankind - is manipulated by political and religious leadership to further the agenda of Islamization. Especially now that Christian youth have begun to defend themselves increasingly against the violent attacks by Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen and armed 'bandits', the narrative becomes confusing, and the risk of [persecution eclipse](#) arises (WWR, WWL - Discussion of key themes, October 2023, p.14). Persecution eclipse is further increased by classifying what is happening in the country as 'sectarian violence', 'communal clashes' or 'civil unrest', as well as by the increasing use of the term 'bandits' or 'criminals' for the jihad-inspired perpetrators.

Comprehensive details about the various violent groups spreading terror in Nigeria are available in the [WWL 2022 Nigeria - Full Country Dossier](#) (pages 20-26). The most well-known are Boko Haram and split-off group Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). There are others too. They all clearly adhere to a jihadist agenda, as do Fulani militants, who have been operating in the country for many years. Although initially more in the shadow of Boko Haram, in recent years these armed Fulani have become much more prominent. Nigeria's Fulani herdsmen are represented by the three major umbrellas of 'the Miyatti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of

Nigeria-MACBAN’, ‘the Miyatti Allah Koutal Hore Association of Nigeria’ and ‘the Fulani Nationality Movement-FUNAM’; these are all federally registered organizations in Nigeria. It seems reasonable to believe that among these three, MACBAN could be considered to be the operational center of the Fulani militants.

Apart from *Islamic oppression* and *Ethno-religious hostility*, WWR distinguishes *Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime* as sources of severe oppression and violence against civilians, in particular Christians. *Dictatorial paranoia* refers to a style of governance that seems more interested in the ruling elite’s own interests than in the interests of the population governed. The oppression of Christian and other minorities in a state or national context, and (mis)using Islam to foster the ruler’s interests, fit that pattern. Perpetrators of *Organized corruption and crime* are represented (among others) by a wide array of bandits or criminal groups, as much involved in raiding Christian communities, killing and kidnapping Christians, raping girls and women (and related violence against them) as the more jihadist-inspired groups. Because of the inability of the authorities to contain that violence, over the years these criminal groups have become very powerful in the country.

Kidnapping in general

According to data provided by the PLSO Partner Liaison Security Operations Team of researchers providing research and data services to US Aid in Abuja, the total number of officially recorded kidnapping incidents during the WWL 2024 reporting period was 470, resulting in 2,475 victims. However, these figures only give a fraction of the true picture. According to WWR, the number of abductions just of Christians was 4,726 in WWL 2023 and 3,300 in WWL 2024. This 30% decrease in the number of Christians abducted may have been caused by a temporary drop in violent incidents targeting Christians in the run-up to the 2023 elections.

Mass kidnappings by large armed groups occur on a frequent basis in Nigeria. A few selected examples are:

- **23 December 2022:** The abduction of 78 people in Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state on 23 December 2022, attributed to ‘bandits’ by media ([Daily Trust, 29 December 2022](#));
- **9 January 2023:** The abduction of 32 people from Tom Ikimi Station in Edo State, in the far south of the country in the Niger Delta, attributed by eyewitnesses to ‘armed Fulani herdsman’ ([This Day, 9 January 2023](#));
- **7 April 2023:** 85 people were abducted in a single attack in Wanzamai village in Chafe LGA in Zamfara state. The Nigerian police stated the militants had demanded a 50-million-naira ransom (\$50,000) ([Daily Post, 10 April 2023](#)).

Mass abductions have had a catastrophic impact on children and students. According to an April 2022 statement by UNICEF (quoted in [Sahara Reporters, 14 April 2022](#)):

- “In Nigeria, a total of 11,536 schools were closed since December 2020 due to abductions and security issues. These school closures have impacted the education of approximately 1.3 million children in the 2020/21 academic year.”

By mid-2023, it was clear that the Tinubu era would not bring about a marked improvement in security for civilians. The Prevention of Terrorism Act - signed into law by President Buhari before he left office - criminalized paying ransom to kidnappers, and carried a 15-year-penalty for paying ransom ([AP News, 28 April 2022](#)). However, the law has been widely ignored.

Kidnapping - the religious dimension

As stated above, 3,300 Christians faced the trauma of abduction in WWL 2024. Christian leaders are, without doubt, a particular target for kidnapping: 39 Roman Catholic priests were reported abducted and murdered in 2022 ([The Tablet, 30 October 2023](#)), and 23 were kidnapped in 2023 ([ACN International, 13 November 2023](#)). There follows a selection of recent cases of Christian pastors and priests being kidnapped or murdered:

- **December 2023:** Rev. Elkanah Ayuba and Rev. Simon Ezra, Methodist pastors, kidnapped along with 20 others. In a video clip Rev. Ayuba appeared to rehearse a political statement at gunpoint ([The Christian Post, 11 January 2024](#)).
- **July 2023:** Pastor Kayode Oluwakemi, of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, killed in church grounds in Ogun state ([Punch Nigeria, 3 July 2023](#)).
- **August 2023:** Two Christian brothers working at St Luke's Anglican Hospital in Wususa, Kaduna state, were abducted on 25 August 2023. The abductions come after the Rev. Jeremiah Mayau, 61-year-old pastor of Tawaliu Baptist Church in Ungwan Mission, Kujama in Chikun County, was shot dead on 23 August 2023. ([Christian Headlines, 6 September 2023](#)).
- **September 2023:** Two trainee Roman Catholic priests were murdered in separate kidnapping incidents in one day: Ezekiel Nuhu and Na'aman Danlami ([CNA, 7 September 2023](#)).
- **October 2023:** Three young Roman Catholics were abducted, and one murdered, in an attack on the Annunciation Benedictine monastery, Eruku, Kwara state ([The Pillar, 25 October 2023](#)).

Christian leaders who spoke to WWR described what they experienced as planned attempts to bankrupt Christian communities, particularly in the North and North-Central. They spoke of 'intergenerational bankruptcy', where extended families found themselves forced to sell land and family assets to save abductees. One church leader stated: "We in Christian communities know that kidnapping actually achieves the aims of terror. It shuts down schools, whole schools and it is the end of Western education in the North. That is a Boko Haram aim. It bankrupts and impoverishes extended families, whole congregations, as Christians will come together to try to free a pastor. And it is resulting in the flight of Christian communities."

Fulani militia attacks

The fragile security picture for Middle Belt farmers worsened with ongoing attacks from Fulani militia or 'radicalized Fulani herdsmen' throughout the WWL 2024 reporting period. In 2023, Release International recorded 686 attacks, some lasting for weeks, and a death toll of 4357 civilians. ([Release International, 29 January 2024](#)). The severity of bloodshed and mostly one-sided nature of attacks was striking. However, a significant number of attacks also occurred outside North-Central.

Episodes of Fulani militia violence included the Mangu District of Plateau State in April and May of 2023 ([Vanguard Nigeria, 9 July 2023](#)). Benue state suffered waves of violence in the first quarter of 2023; hundreds of killing sprees resulting in 500+ murders in Benue alone in 2023 ([ACN International, 25 January 2024](#)). The southerly encroachment of armed Fulani attacks is clear. Ten years ago, attacks in Benue state were considered strikes far in the south. In 2023, Benue state had become an epicenter of violence, and the outreaches were in the far south of the country, in Obetim Community, Delta state ([Leadership, 30 July 2023](#)), in Bayelsa state ([Ripples Nigeria, 28 March 2023](#)) and in the South West ([Punch Nigeria, 3 May 2023](#)).

Cults

Another category of violent groups are so-called cults which were initially established as student societies to provide a sense of belonging, power and solidarity; however, over the years they have become a major menace to Nigerian society, contributing to the levels of violence across the country. Although their leaders deny it, they are responsible for "attacking and killing fellow students, armed robbery and general gangsterism tendencies", according to a Nigerian analyst. Cult members are mostly students in tertiary institutions but recently community-based groups have emerged without any affiliation to an institution. Normally cults are not related to or allied with jihadist groups. However, apart from the direct threat they pose to society, their activities have the potential to trigger extra tension in conflict zones, acting like a spark in a powder keg. For a detailed example, see [BBC News, 13 December 2021](#).

There is an ongoing discussion about whether all these violent groups are linked somehow to a jihadist agenda, or not. The questions being asked are whether there has been "[A Jihadization of Banditry, or a 'Banditization' of Jihad](#)", or whether jihad and banditry simply overlap or are not linked at all. Together, these violent groups have instilled an atmosphere of terror over a large part of Nigerian territory. In this discussion, a complicating factor is that the term 'bandits' tends to be used as a catch-all category by the media, which could also include Boko Haram, ISWAP or Fulani militants. At times, it also seems likely that the term 'bandits' is not only used to simplify reporting but also to mask the true nature of the perpetrators.

While the security situation in Nigeria has become very problematic, there has been a rather strong suspicion about the role of the Federal government's security apparatus in the country. In the past years, several cases were reported in which the security forces failed to protect citizens against attacks from violent groups. They either did not act or arrived too late at the scene of the violence. WWL has received some reports that include a growing suspicion among those attacked that the security forces may have had a more active role in the violence.

Corruption is also a major concern in Nigeria. The violent attacks on Christians and Christian communities are partly 'fall-out' from systemic corruption and are kept on-going through the emergence of a 'conflict industry', which in turn is sustained by a culture of impunity. A conflict industry is where some people benefit economically from conflict. Such beneficiaries could be Muslim or Christian. For example, some people import and/or sell weapons to belligerent groups, or even army uniforms to Boko Haram or ISWAP insurgents, Fulani militants and armed bandits. The lucrative economic benefits from such activity induces the officials involved to look the other way rather than challenge corrupt practices that compromise the security of citizens. Hence, conflict has become a money-making enterprise.

Gender perspective

The security situation also has a gender component. Christian men and boys are specifically targeted for killing, resulting in a declined birth-rate of Christians and the opportunity to claim their land. With the emphasis on killing men and older boys, there are many Christian widows in the northern part of the country. A Christian widow may lose her children to Muslim relatives to be raised as Muslims, even when she has raised them previously as Christians.

A spike in abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Christian girls and women, including married women, has further depopulated Christian-dominated territories in the north. Islamic militants also rape and sexually abuse women, forcing them into sexual slavery, or killing them. CREID highlights the fact that violence against women is on the rise in northern Nigeria, in part due to COVID-19 ([CREID podcast, 15 October 2020](#)). There were at least 3,600 cases of rape during the lockdown in April 2020, according to the Ministry of Women Affairs, and the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) over the whole of 2020 received about 11,200 reports of rape ([Amnesty International news, 17 November 2021](#)).

A [public poll](#) conducted in 2019 revealed that 85% of Nigerians recognized rape as prevalent in the country (NOIPOLLS, 25 July 2019). Whilst there are statutory laws that criminalize rape, in the rare incidents that rape crimes are reported (due to feelings of shame and fear of stigmatization), convictions are seldom reached due to outdated and inconsistent penal laws and court proceedings and reports that some police officers themselves are [rapists](#) (BBC News, 4 June 2020).

Trends analysis

1) Nigeria has been weakened by a complex combination of deep-rooted issues

One of the most complex and corrupt nations in West Africa, Nigeria has long been struggling with deep-rooted issues. Due to the country's size (in terms of geography, population and levels of natural resources), it has the potential to be a strong force on the continent. However, the political instability, insecurity and rampant corruption that have characterized the country for decades and still persist, have weakened it considerably. Regional, ethnic and religious tensions exacerbate the problem. The extent to which these issues are addressed will determine whether or not Nigeria will be able to realize its potential and become a prosperous and stable country. However, the current trends in the country seem to indicate that Nigeria will continue to be a country struggling to stay afloat.

2) The security crisis has evolved from a combination of violent actors and factors

The rise of Boko Haram in the last decade has made the situation even more complex. Since President Buhari came to power, military offensives led to the decimation of Boko Haram in numbers. But Boko Haram militants have shown their resilience by moving to weak neighboring countries, and rebuilding their strength in Nigeria too. ISWAP added to the spectrum of violent Islamic groups. There are also numerous attacks by Fulani militants and armed bandits in the north, even in the south, and the government has not produced any working plan to solve the crisis. Boko Haram, ISWAP, the Fulani militants and armed bandits possess types and quantities

of weapons that raise questions about their origin. One of the sources is almost certainly Turkey ([CBN News](#), 14 November 2019; [Gatestone Institute](#), 3 November 2019). Indeed, there are allegations that at least since December 2014, Turkey has been supporting and supplying weapons to both Boko Haram and the Nigerian armed forces ([RLPB 680: Nigerian Elections 3: Buhari's Legacy, 15 February 2023](#)). Similarly, there are allegations that corruption in Nigerian government circles has been prolonging the conflict by supplying weapons to jihadists. It is claimed that fake contracts for provisions and equipment could have totaled as much as US\$15 billion ([Religious Liberty Monitoring](#), 28 May 2019). Meanwhile, Nigeria has been reaching out to Iran for both military equipment and training ([Iran Press](#), 4 September 2022). If the ethno-religious hostilities further develop along the existing lines, Christian vulnerability will be unimaginable.

The circles of influence of Boko Haram, ISWAP, the Fulani militants and armed bandits have increasingly overlapped, including their agendas. Boko Haram's leader, Shekau, when still alive, was at least partly responsible for this. He had made a rigorous [shift in attitude](#) ([HumAngle](#), 12 July 2020) and tried to forge alliances with various groups in northern Nigeria – such alliances included adherence to his radical Islamic agenda. A 2020 report by Jamestown Foundation also explains how the larger jihadist organizations have sought to “win over bandit groups, professionalize them so they can withstand increasing pressure from security forces, and guide them in administering villages and towns from which the government is absent, or retreat in an ‘Islamic’ way that legitimizes their rule” ([Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor Volume 18, Issue 15, 28 July 2020](#)). Further: “Analysts suspect that Ansaru is recruiting Fulani herdsmen and bandits into its ranks and that Ansaru jihadists, posing as herdsmen and bandits, are participating in the Fulani jihad” ([RLPB 562, Nigeria 2: Insecurity Enables Terrorist Expansion, 12 August 2020](#)).

3) Vicious circle of violence against Christians leads to high levels of internal displacement

As a result of the increasing levels of insecurity, several states in northern Nigeria have vast numbers of IDPs, many of whom are Christians. Many of them are not taken care of by national or international aid agencies. They are a visible witness to the supremacy of the perpetrators and to the high vulnerability of the victims of violations in the region. And this, in turn, encourages further violence and culminates in constant fear among the Christian population where attacks are common.

Recent statements by Catholic church leaders indicate how severely the Christian community is being affected by the security crisis. Indeed, as reported by Nigeria Update on 6 October 2021, Catholic leaders go so far as to claim that Nigerian Christians have become victims of a [gradual process of ethnic cleansing](#) at the hands of Fulani Muslims, with the complicity of the state. At a recent online conference, one leader from the diocese of Maiduguri “expressed frustration when he hears people refer to ‘clashes’ or ‘conflicts’ between opposing groups. ‘It is not a clash, it is a slow genocide. To displace people from their ancestral homeland, deprive them of their livelihood and butcher them is a form of genocide.’”

Regardless of whether the facts meet international legal definitions of ethnic cleansing or genocide, this vicious circle of violence can only be broken if the international community intervenes with humanitarian (and other forms of) aid, and puts pressure on the Nigerian gov-

ernment to come up with a comprehensive policy to address this complex and deadly situation. World Watch Research invites the international community to investigate whether the violence committed amounts to genocide and/or crimes against humanity.

4) Christians have allegedly begun to organize their own defense

Christians are allegedly increasingly organizing their own defense, although they can hardly match the types and amounts of weapons their adversaries are using. Having said that, much of Christianity in Nigeria is still not willing to respond with violence. However, certain Christian young men who see their mothers and sisters raped and their fathers and brothers killed, will likely increasingly try to arm themselves and defend their families and villages. This is a very risky situation, because notwithstanding the concept of 'just war' (self-defense), it can easily lead to disproportional retaliation on Fulani villagers and other Muslims, as well as lead to outright banditry when 'just war' and 'lust for personal gain' get confused.

5) Nigeria could become a destabilizing power for the entire region

Nigeria has become a destabilizing influence for the countries surrounding it, particularly because of the actions of Boko Haram and ISWAP. If in the near or distant future Nigeria emerges out of the current chaos as an Islamized nation, built upon the influence wielded by violent Islamic militancy, Nigeria could become an even more strongly destabilizing power for the entire region. The success of the insurgents might embolden [other such groups](#) on the continent, some of which are directly or indirectly related to each other (WWR, Africa: Mapping Islamic militancy – past, present and future, July 2019). A similar situation confronted the international community when the Islamic State group conquered parts of Syria and Iraq; however, the Nigerian situation is being neglected or misinterpreted.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: religious conversions en masse - https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Eat_the_Heart_of_the_Infidel/AC1hDwAAQBAJ
- Recent history: does not mention - <https://www.thecable.ng/review-secularity-nigerian-1999-constitution>
- Recent history: officially claimed - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/311160-boko-haram-is-defeated-nigeria-now-facing-global-insurgency-minister.html?tztc=1>
- Recent history: same claim - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/257482-boko-haram-now-completely-defeated-nigerian-army.html>
- Recent history: killed - <https://humangle.ng/what-shekaus-death-means-for-security-in-nigeria-lake-chad/>
- Recent history: shift in attitude - <https://humangle.ng/nigerias-terror-king-shekau-connects-east-west-and-centre-in-a-puzzling-agenda/>
- Recent history: 51,828 Boko Haram fighters - <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/irabor-at-edo-varsity-founders-day-51828-boko-haram-fighters-surrender-in-18-months-cds/>
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- Political and legal landscape: interference in freedom of worship - <https://guardian.ng/news/csos-kick-against-bill-to-regulate-christianity-in-nigeria/>
- Political and legal landscape: accuse a Christian nurse of blasphemy - <https://adfinternational.org/en-gb/news/rhoda-jatau-trial>
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- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF - <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/education>
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- Security situation: CNA, 7 September 2023 - <https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/255321/seminarian-in-nigeria-burned-alive-in-botched-kidnapping>
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- Security situation: ACN International, 25 January 2024 - <https://acninternational.org/attacks-caused-over-500-victims-in-nigerias-benue-state-in-2023/>
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- Trends analysis: Gatestone Institute - <https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/15116/turkey-boko-haram-weapons>
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- Trends analysis: gradual process of ethnic cleansing - <https://dhpi.org.za/nigeria-update-6-october-2021/>
- Trends analysis: other such groups - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Africa-Mapping-Islamic-militancy-July-2019-FINAL.pdf>

WWL 2024: Church information / Nigeria

Christian origins

African traditional religions were dominant in the southern part of the country before European missionaries introduced Christianity. The first Christian mission that reached Nigeria was during the Portuguese dominance of the Atlantic Coast in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, during that period, the [Portuguese Catholics](#) gave priority to economic and political activities, as a result of which Christian mission made no headway and most parts of the country continued to follow traditional African religions (Urhobo Historical Society, 1979).

Following the British Empire's abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, another serious attempt was made to re-introduce Christianity to Nigeria. The liberated slaves who had already converted became instrumental in evangelizing the indigenous population. The case of [Samuel Adjai Crowther](#), who was the first Nigerian Anglican priest, can be taken as an example (Dictionary of African Christian Biography, last accessed 13 April 2023). He played a key role in evangelizing in Yorubaland. After witnessing the success of Crowther, Anglicans of the Church Missionary Society, Methodists, Baptists and Roman Catholics all increased efforts to have a strong Christian presence in Nigeria.

As Christianity started to flourish in Nigeria, issues of discrimination, marginalization of African elites and disputes over resources etc. started pitting Christians against Christians and many church divisions resulted. The United Native African Church and the African Church (Bethel) broke away from the Anglican Church in 1891 and 1901 respectively. In 1917 the United African Methodist Church seceded from the Methodist Church. Since 1950, Pentecostal churches have become very visible, some of the major ones being the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Deeper Life Bible Church and the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church. There are also many other Pentecostal groups such as the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International, Youth with a Mission and Christ for all Nations.

Christian missionaries were less successful in the northern part of the country where the Hausa-Fulani tribal kingdoms were already Muslim. There were very few conversions of Muslims to Christianity during the colonial period. Part of this might be attributed to the fact that northern Nigeria was placed under indirect rule which meant that Christian missionary activity was not allowed to operate freely.

Church spectrum today

Nigeria: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	3,000	0.0
Catholic	27,259,000	26.5
Protestant	63,180,000	61.3
Independent	29,612,000	28.8
Unaffiliated	148,000	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-17,214,000	-16.7
Total	102,988,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	49,295,000	47.9
Renewalist movement	65,814,000	63.9

Data source: Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds. , *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed March 2023)

Orthodox: Eastern (Chalcedonian), Oriental (Pre-Chalcedonian, Non-Chalcedonian, Monophysite), Nestorian (Assyrian), and non-historical Orthodox. **Roman Catholics:** All Christians in communion with the Church of Rome. **Protestants:** Christians in churches originating in or in communion with the Western world's 16th-century Protestant Reformation. Includes Anglicans, Lutherans and Baptists (any of whom may be Charismatic) and denominational Pentecostals, but not Independent traditions such as Independent Baptists nor independent Charismatics. **Independents:** Christians who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). **Unaffiliated Christians:** Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. **Doubly-affiliated Christians:** Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. **Evangelical movement:** Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. **Renewalist movement:** Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.

In the regions where there is violence, all Christians are potential targets, no matter which denomination they belong to. However, converts from Islam to Christianity suffer most, especially in the North, if discovered. The idea that to be a Northerner is to be a Muslim, and to be a Southerner is to be a Christian, is a gross simplification of the situation (see above: *Religious landscape*). Christians are making great efforts to convert Muslims to Christianity in the North, although Christian evangelism in the North has become difficult because of security issues. At the same time, Muslims are making great efforts to convert Christians to Islam in the South.



Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Nigeria has six geo-political zones: North-West; North-Central (loosely known as the Middle Belt); North-East; South-West; South-South (also known as the Niger Delta region); South-East. Persecution and discrimination are strongest in the three northern geo-political zones.

Previously, each zone had its own profile of hostilities against Christians (and others). Violence in the North-East was mainly perpetrated by Boko Haram and ISWAP. In the North-West zone there were the armed bandits and in the North-Central (including Kaduna State), there were the armed Fulani herdsmen. The circles of influence of these different groups have been increasingly overlapping, including their agendas. It has become increasingly difficult to even distinguish which violent group did what, more so, what is the specific identity of a certain group. Much of this had to do with Boko Haram's leadership which tried to create alliances with different groups in the North, also reaching into the South. (See above: *Recent history* and *Trends analysis*.)

The situation of basic rights violations in the 12 Sharia states (Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara) and in the 7 remaining states (Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Taraba) has been described above (see: *Specific examples of rights violations*).

A very specific form of violence against Christians are the raids on often small Christian communities in the rural areas of various states. When a (mainly) Christian community is attacked, some of the residents are killed, others are (seriously) wounded and others are abduc-

ted. Often men and boys are killed, with women and girls being abducted. Many flee from their houses and fields. There is constant fear: When night falls, there is always the danger of possible attack, and anxiety about what might happen to oneself and one's family. If a husband or older sons are killed, the wife/mother and younger children are left behind in a state of great vulnerability. When a wife or daughter is abducted, a man is left tormented by the thoughts of what might be happening to her. (For more information, see below: *Violence section*.)

The raids on Christian communities, and other forms of violence, lead to large numbers of Christians (and also other Nigerians) being forced to live in formal or informal IDP camps and cause loss of family farmland and property and hence loss of future well-being. Women and children are particularly vulnerable in such circumstances: Children are vulnerable to health issues, and women and girls to abuse and human trafficking. This situation is aggravated by the fact that the Nigerian government does little to assist these IDPs, and is not curbing the situation that has created the crisis.

Violence and land grabbing are not limited to the North alone. On 15 September 2019, the Afenifere Renewal Group (a pan-Yoruba socio-political organization) asked all governors in the South-West to put an end to the rising spate of attacks by Fulani militants in the region, noting that their undue silence would not promote peace and security. On 3 March 2020, five South-West houses of assembly passed bills for the establishment of 'Amotekun', a security unit set up to address the security challenges in the region covering the states of Lagos, Osun, Ondo, Oyo and Ogun.

Until recently the south-eastern part of the country was relatively peaceful. That has changed. According to a [Global Sentinel report on 28 May 2020](#), the Nigerian rights group Intersociety claimed (in a special report on issues affecting Igbo people of South-East and South-South zones) that "not less than 350 Igbo communities, villages and other locations are now invaded and permanently occupied by armed Fulani herdsmen and 'imported' Shuwa Arabs, also called 'Cowmen' in Arabic." The number was 139 communities in August 2019, and rose to 350 in May 2020. Intersociety states that the alleged occupation "is vicariously, if not directly aided by the Government of Nigeria and its security agencies especially the Army and the Police." Further research revealed that the invasion and permanent occupation of communities, villages and locations must be understood here differently than in the northern context. It seems the population was not directly driven away from their villages but in many cases found that their distant forests and farmlands had been taken over by Fulani militants (and Shuwa Arabs). Since then, the situation has not improved.

Christian communities and how they are affected

Communities of expatriate Christians: Expatriate Christians in Nigeria are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored separately in WWL analysis.

Historical Christian communities: In Nigeria these include the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations such as Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans. Christians belonging to these churches face violent attacks against their life and property perpetrated by militant groups and discrimination from the local authorities, especially in the three northern zones. The insecurity they face has extended into parts of the southern zones too, although to a lesser extent.

Converts to Christianity: These are mostly converts from Islam to Christianity. Those in northern Nigeria often have to flee their homes and states to escape being killed or harassed. They are often forced to find refuge in 'safe houses'. This is less likely to occur in the South, although it happens to a limited degree in south-western areas. There is sometimes pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity in other parts of the country too but this is less frequent and with (much) less intensity than elsewhere.

Non-traditional Christian communities: The Evangelical and Pentecostal communities now make up a considerable proportion of the Nigerian Church. As is the case for the Historical Christian communities, in the three northern zones Christians belonging to the Evangelical and Pentecostal communities face discrimination by the local authorities, as well as violent attacks against their life and property by militant groups. The difficulties they face are similar to those faced by the Historical Christian communities. Some of them are very active in evangelism, and go where it is really dangerous to go, which can increase the risk of being attacked. Though to a lesser extent, the insecurity they face has extended into parts of the southern zones too.

External Links - Church information

- Christian origins: Portuguese Catholics - <http://www.waado.org/UrhoboCulture/Religion/Erivwo/HistoryOfChristianity/ChapterOne.html>
- Christian origins: Samuel Adjai Crowther - <https://dacb.org/stories/nigeria/legacy-crowther/>
- Areas where Christians face most difficulties: Global Sentinel report on 28 May 2020 - <https://globalsentinelng.com/2020/05/28/special-report-intersociety-lists-350-igbo-communities-invaded-and-permanently-occupied-by-fulani-herdsmen-shuwa-arabs/>

WWL 2024: Persecution Dynamics / Nigeria

Reporting period

1 October 2022 - 30 September 2023

Position on the World Watch List

Nigeria: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2024	88	6
WWL 2023	88	6
WWL 2022	87	7
WWL 2021	85	9
WWL 2020	80	12

Both pressure and violence scores (the latter at the maximum level possible) have remained largely unchanged in the WWL 2024 reporting period. Christians and their communities continue to be attacked in many parts of the country. Although 2023 saw the installation of a new president, with Bola Ahmed Tinubu replacing Muhammadu Buhari, it is unclear what this might mean for the Christian population. Despite both Buhari and Tinubu being Muslim – breaking an

informal agreement that presidency should switch between a Christian and a Muslim – the new president has carried out a major reshuffle which provides a better representative balance of the two faiths than was in place under Buhari. This might cause a positive shift towards acknowledging the extent of the human rights violations being perpetrated against Christians, and lead to more effective intervention by security forces to protect Christians. However, proof of this has yet to be provided.

Persecution engines

Nigeria: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Very strong
Clan oppression	CO	Weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very strong

The scale for the level of influence of Persecution engines in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. For more information see WWL Methodology.

The persecution situation in Nigeria is a blend of 4 very strong Persecution engines:

- **Islamic oppression**
- **Ethno-religious hostility**
- **Dictatorial paranoia**
- **Organized corruption and crime**

According to Dr Funom Makama: "In 2001 at an Islamic seminar in Kaduna, Buhari was given an opportunity to choose between Nigeria's secularism and fundamentalist Islam, this is what he said; 'I will continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria'. He then added that 'God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country'."

(Source: Makama F, A compilation of Online Publications and Press Releases as Proofs of the Killings of Christians in Nigeria, 2020, p.5.)

The guiding principle behind this potentially explosive blend of Persecution engines seems to be 'Islamization at all costs'. It is difficult to know if there is such a thing as a policy (or set of policies) designed for it, or that it is more a case of just how things are going. The above quote from former President Buhari suggests it is not so much about policies but more about 'agitation', in other words, about creating or allowing for chaos or impunity to prevail.

In the northern states, Sharia law keeps Christians in a position of being second-class citizens. If Sharia becomes the norm for the whole country, this second-class citizenship might be the future for all Christians in Nigeria, as well as for Ethno-religionists.

In Nigeria, the oppressive Islamization process is being pushed by three main ethnic groups acting together: Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri. Although some of their group members have converted to Christianity, they are strongly attached to a political Islamic agenda. Those effectively in political control of Nigeria today are from these three ethnic groups. This creates the risk of ethnic conflict. A Nigerian analyst thinks that other ethnic groups (outside this coalition) are watching carefully. If the Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri go too far, it might just lead to war. He has expressed his fear that the country might move in this direction if things continue as they are, since many are feeling excluded.

Important to note is that there is increasing tension between the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. Anecdotal evidence speaks of hostilities emerging in particular in the northwestern states of Sokoto and Zamfara. According to a Nigerian analyst: “Hausa and Fulani feuds are growing by the day; it may likely snowball into full blown war in the near future due to the gradual understanding of age-long domination by Fulanis over Hausas.”

In northern Nigeria violence committed in the name of Islam by Boko Haram and ISWAP against civilians, and especially against Christians, is rampant. The same applies for violence committed by armed Fulani herdsmen and the so-called bandits. As explained above (see: *Trends analysis*), the circles of influence of these different groups are now increasingly overlapping, including their agendas, and this is a threatening development not only for the northern states but also the southern states. Clear examples of land-grabbing and related violence by armed Fulani herdsmen, can already be seen in many southern states (see above: *Recent history*).

As suggested in the section above entitled *Trends analysis*, if the current developments in Nigeria are extrapolated into the future, there will be so much ‘agitation’ (to use Buhari’s term from 2001) and chaos, that it will no longer be possible to distinguish good actors from bad. Ultimately, such chaos could give rise to a new Nigeria that is governed by Sharia, born out of violence, discrimination and intolerance against Christians and any others who are not following the same Islamist agenda.

Drivers of persecution

Nigeria: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	-	VERY STRONG	WEAK	-	-	-	VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Very strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	Very strong	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very strong	-	Very strong	Weak	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	Medium	Medium
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	Strong	Very strong
Ideological pressure groups	Very strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	Weak	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	Weak	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Medium	Medium
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The scale for the level of influence of Drivers of persecution in society is: Not at all / Very weak / Weak / Medium / Strong / Very strong. Please note that "-" denotes "not at all". For more information see WWL Methodology.

Drivers of the blend of Islamic oppression, Ethno-religious hostility, Dictatorial paranoia, Organized corruption and crime

- Government officials (Very strong to Strong):** It would appear that former President Muhammadu Buhari used his position to appoint Muslims to key positions in the country, and to allow a culture of impunity that makes it possible for violations against Christians to go largely unnoticed. The governments (and non-state actors) of the 12 Sharia states were already on the same track, but they may thus feel encouraged to further Islamize their states with oppressive policies instead of guaranteeing the elementary rights of their Christian citizens (freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of expression). Governments (and non-state actors) in other states might also feel encouraged, or sometimes forced, to

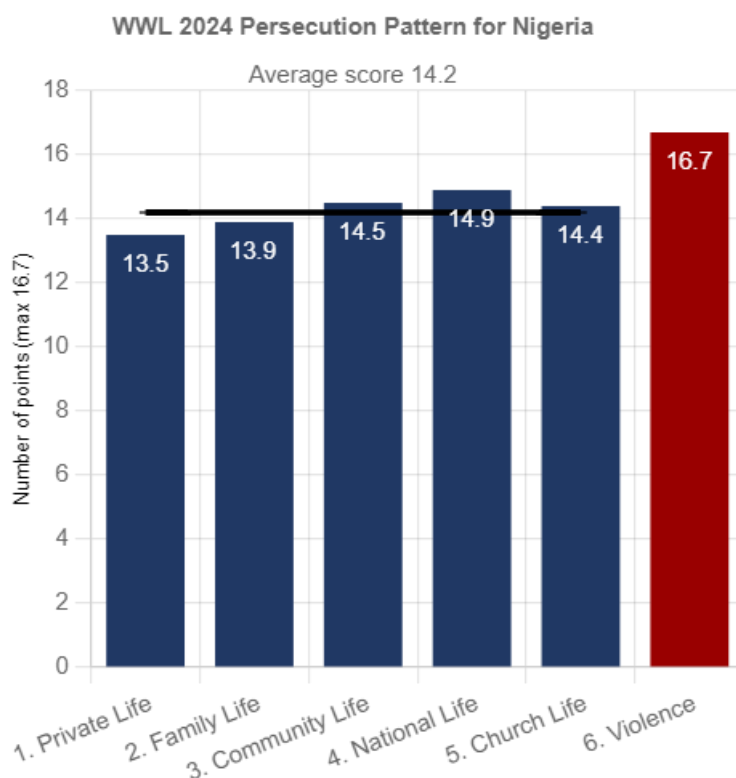
promote (further) Islamization of their states, even in the South: In particular, by not being able to protect their citizens against violence from Islamic militants, given that the security apparatus is not under their command. Some state governments are trying to protect their whole citizenry, but with limited resources.

- **Ethnic group leaders (Very strong to Weak):** Ethnic group leaders as drivers of persecution and discrimination have two dimensions: One dimension concerns whether (and how) they persecute group members who convert to Christianity from the generally held religion (i.e. from African Traditional Religion/ATR or Islam). The other dimension concerns whether (and how) they commit acts of persecution and discrimination between ethnic groups with different religions. In the past, when ATR was dominant, rights violations of Christian converts by adherents of ATR was common, but violations in this context have gradually reduced and come now primarily from the Muslim Hausa-Fulani group (together with the Kanuris). Unlike the south of Nigeria which has ethnic tribal chiefs, most northern tribes have religious rulers or emirs instead. Many of them subscribe to the agenda of furthering the oppressive Islamization policies of their ethnic groups and beyond.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very Strong to Medium):** Many Muslim religious leaders have been sources of basic rights violations against Christians at the level of religious ideology, intolerant messaging and incitement.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong to Strong):** There are various violent groups but in the context of WWL analysis the most prominent ones are Boko Haram, ISWAP, armed Fulani herdsmen and armed bandits (see above: *Security situation*).
- **Ideological pressure groups (Very strong to Strong):** The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) deserves a special mention here: Not all Fulani herdsmen are violent militants and some even feel victimized because they are Fulani although they have not been involved in violent attacks. However, the activities of MACBAN have become highly politicized in recent times because of links to powerful patrons, including former President Buhari and the Sultan of Sokoto. MACBAN gives protection to Fulani militants and justification for their aggression. The former president and the Sultan of Sokoto have continually shown tacit support for the expansionist agenda of the Fulani militants. MACBAN claims to be a socio-cultural group, representing the interest of cattle rearers all over Nigeria, but essentially, they are very focused on ethnicity in their composition and outlook. It is important to note that many of the Fulani herdsmen are mere fronts for influential people who actually own the cattle. There are also many Fulani Christians and non-Fulanis who own plenty of cows in Nigeria today. MACBAN does not treat them as bona fide members. MACBAN seeks to defend the course which Fulani Muslims are taking, including justifying the Fulani militia's violence against farmers. Fulani settlers are diverse. They are not all linked to Fulani herdsmen beyond sharing ethnic and religious identity. Many Fulani settlers who are Muslim are known to work with their Hausa Muslim counterparts to suppress Christians politically, socially and economically within their domains.
- **Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs (Strong to Weak):** Apart from the hostility from state and organized non-state actors, another source of persecution and intolerance is the 'street violence' where Muslims in the local community riot and attack Christians for flimsy reasons or false accusations of blasphemy in northern Nigeria. This occurs mostly in the context of the Persecution engine *Islamic oppression*. A Muslim south-

erner who grew up in the North recently said that northern Muslims would borrow money from her and promise to repay her during the next riot. This anecdotal evidence shows that these attacks are not always spontaneous but sometimes premeditated as a means of looting the 'infidels'. Christians have been losing property, churches and lives in the recurring violence for decades.

- ***One's own (extended) family (Strong to Weak):*** In the context of conversion from Islam to Christianity, one's own family (or extended family) is the primary threat. They are often the first to know, and depending on their standing in the community, may be the first to want to protect their family honor. This is especially the case in the northern states (including the Muslim majority part of the North-Central zone) where Islam has become an all-embracing attribute of identity, or where the Islamic religious identity has become politicized.
- ***Political parties (Strong):*** The two main political parties in Nigeria are divided along religious lines. These religious divisions are based not so much on ideology as on religious sentiment. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is perceived to be sympathetic towards Christians. The All Progressive Congress (APC) on the other hand is seen by the Nigerian public to be pro-Islam. Nigeria's current ruling party (APC) is actually an alliance between Muslims in the North and the South, which was reflected in the 2023 election where Bola Tinubu (former Governor of Lagos) was chosen by the APC as a Southern Muslim candidate with Kashim Shettima as his running mate, a Northern Muslim (former Governor of Borno state) – a so-called 'Muslim-Muslim ticket' ([RLPB 678](#), 1 February 2023). This is also reflected in the APC's whole approach towards governance and policies that are inherently pro-Islam and anti-Christian.
- ***Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong):*** Drivers of the Persecution engine *Organized corruption and crime* can be government officials at various levels, together with other leading people from different sectors of society. This is explained in more detail in the section above: *Security situation*. Another category are criminal groups, which, in the context of Nigeria, often partly overlap with religious-ideological groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and some armed bandit groups. They are not always directly responsible for committing violence against Christians because of their faith; their responsibility is also indirect where, for instance, they contribute to an escalation of 'agitation' or chaos that leads to '[persecution eclipse](#)', thus adding to the push for further oppressive Islamization of the country (WWR, WWL - Discussion of key themes, October 2023, p.14).
- ***Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies (Strong):*** Though covertly and more softly, many embassies are involved in deeply rooted discrimination against Christians in Nigeria. The government is aware of this but is avoiding the issue because these embassies are promoting Islam: Significant levels of funding and aid come from Arab countries which act as channels for empowering the Muslim population. This includes the building of mostly Islamic schools and hospitals with limited access for Christians. Rural Christians are particularly in need of healthcare, especially in northern Nigeria. The authorities make use of the aid and facilities supplied to entice Christians to leave their faith in order to gain access.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2024 persecution pattern for Nigeria shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nigeria is extremely high at a level of 14.2 points.
- Except for *Private life*, all other *spheres of life* scored 13.9 points or more out of the maximum of 16.7, thus recording extreme levels of pressure.
- The score for violence is the maximum possible (16.7 points). Over the last years (WWL 2015 - WWL 2024), Nigeria's violence score has repeatedly reached the maximum level, only dipping in WWL 2017 and WWL 2018 to scores of 16.1 and 16.5 points respectively.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2024 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the "WWL Scoring example" in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://open Doors analytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.9: It has been risky for Christians to meet with other Christians. (3.50 points)

In many states it is highly risky to conduct acts of worship for fear of being attacked by a violent Islamic group. Many rural churches have had all forms of Christian worship completely stopped. The levels of fear among Christian communities, in particular in these rural areas, are high, so churches have stopped their activities until the time when the security situation improves. So,

for Christians to meet for any church activity it is risky and dangerous; anytime they meet they become vulnerable and exposed to the elements that seek to do them harm. This also applies for Christians in IDP situations, where church-related activities make them very visible.

Block 1.1: Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, including conversion from one type of Christianity to another. (3.25 points)

Converts to Christianity from Islam in the three northern zones often have to flee their homes and states to escape being killed or harassed. They usually find refuge in 'safe houses'. This is less likely to occur in the South, although it can happen in some areas in the South-West. There is also sometimes pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity in other parts of the country, but this is less frequent and with (much) less intensity.

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.25 points)

In the three northern zones any open identification of being a Christian is dangerous for Muslim converts. For other Christians, it is also dangerous during attacks and sometimes in IDP situations. Christians are easily detected by their Christian names. One's ID is regularly the passport to life or death at road blocks set up by violent Islamic groups (including armed bandits). This is not limited to the North but could even happen in some parts in the South.

Block 1.10: Christians have been isolated from other family members or other like-minded Christians (e.g. house arrest). (3.25 points)

Recent converts often face immense hostility from their Muslim families and may face forced isolation and starvation if they refuse to recant. Indeed, it is believed that many have died secretly under house-arrest.

Private life - Additional information

Private life is under serious pressure for converts from Islam to Christianity. They often have to hide their conversion for fear of discovery, or flee to prevent their new faith being discovered. The increasing oppressive Islamization in the country makes this situation worse. But there is more to consider: Even non-converts can be in danger for the simple fact of being recognized as Christians, for instance at roadblocks, at school or in their villages. Many Christians in the North live in IDP situations where they sometimes also have to keep a low profile. This is especially true for Christian girls and women. All this makes it difficult to simply be a Christian - not only in the North, but also to a lesser degree in the South.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (4.00 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. The violence committed by violent Islamic militants has caused many Christians to be separated from their loved ones. Many have been forced to leave their families either in an IDP camp or other safe location, and then to go to other places to find jobs to support their families. Or they remain in

the more dangerous regions for the same reason. Parents and children are also separated from each other through abduction. This also happens in a non-militant Islamic context in the North, particularly the abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Christian girls. There are even cases of Christian girls who have been abducted from the South and married off in the North.

Block 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South (see above: *Areas where Christians face most difficulties*). In public schools, offices, hospitals etc. there is pervasive discrimination of Christians even just from having biblical or English names. The children of Christians are often more susceptible to such discrimination than adults. That also applies for various forms of violence: There are times where children are killed or maimed, abducted or sexually assaulted because of the Christian faith of their parents (see below: *Gender-specific religious persecution*).

Block 2.1: Babies and children of Christians have automatically been registered under the state or majority religion. (3.25 points)

Many Christian babies in northern states are not registered at birth. Once a parent of a child is known to be a Christian, the registration officer often denies registering the child under the state. State officials often claim that they do not have indigenous Christians in their state, so those children cannot be registered under that state. Parents are asked to provide proof of their indigeneship before their infants will be reluctantly registered. This is a huge challenge for Christians, especially Hausa Christians. Kano, Katsina, Zamfara, and Yobe are all at the forefront of these kinds of limitations. Such problems are also faced (although less frequently) across the North-Eastern states.

Block 2.7: Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs. (3.25 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. For converts it is very difficult due to the fear of discovery in their families and beyond. Added to that, if the conversion of a parent from Islam to Christianity is discovered, often their children are taken away from them, or they have to flee and lose contact with their children. Also, when Christian women are widowed, Muslim relatives sometimes take the children to make sure they grow up as Muslims. This might happen even after widowed mothers had raised them as Christians for years. Sometimes parents have to hide the Christian identity of their children to avoid persecution. Many parents have to raise their children in IDP situations, which also makes it difficult for Christian parents to train their children in Christian faith and values.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.75 points)

Abduction and/or forced marriage mostly occurs in the North, although increasingly also in the South. Christian girls and women are the most affected (see below - Violence section – for understanding the enormous fear and uncertainty this brings.) Female converts are especially vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. Christian men are often abducted for ransom. Church leaders are increasingly specifically targeted. The children of pastors are also targeted to spite their fathers and aggravate the Christian community. An additional motivation for the abduction of Christians girls and forced marriage could be the desire to depopulate Christianity and populate Islam. Even married Christian women are sometimes targets. Cases of abduction for forced marriage are sometimes carried out with the active connivance of ruling emirs.

Block 3.7: Christians have been pressured by their community to renounce their faith. (3.75 points)

According to a Nigerian analyst:

- "Islam within northern Nigeria uses everything possible to pressure Christians into leaving the Christian faith, be it money, land-grabbing, forceful abduction or denial of rights. Many minority Christian groups have been denied access to basic social amenities in an attempt to force them to accept Islam. Because of high levels of poverty, money is also being used to entice Christian youth to leave the Christian faith. Many young girls and women have been put under immense pressure to denounce Christianity to join Islam because of false promises of comfort and luxury. It is a constant battle for Christians. They make you suffer, then offer solutions with the condition of accepting Islam for you to get the help."

Apart from what is happening in northern Nigeria, there is pressure in southern Nigeria as well. Another Nigerian analyst added that pressure on Christians to renounce their faith "is very common in the government ministries, companies and other social places".

Block 3.4: Christians have been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. It has two dimensions: One is about Christians living in the same locality as Muslims and not being allowed access to the water well or local dispensary, because the Christians are deemed 'impure'. Another is about the local or state authorities. Social amenities from the government do not reach Christian communities as they ought to. Often they just receive a token amount. With respect to the provision of infrastructural development, more is invested in Muslim-dominated areas than in Christian-dominated ones in states where Christians and Muslims are almost an equal 50-50 percentage. Some Christian communities in rural areas have been completely denied water and have to trek for hours to fetch water. Even in cities, the Christian quarters are sometimes denied amenities such as sanitation services. Furthermore, there are many Christian IDPs in the northern zones. However, Nigerian relief agencies tend to be biased when it comes to the distri-

bution of relief items: Christians are often left out and relief agencies in Nigeria agencies are known not to respond swiftly when emergencies involve large numbers of Christians. Even when humanitarian aid is brought, it is often [grossly inadequate](#) (WWR, Nigeria: Assessment of Christian situation in 4 north-eastern states - June 2017, published May 2018).

Block 3.9: Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education). (3.50 points)

Most of this happens in the North. Christians are often discriminated against in their educational pursuits. Particularly Christian or tribal names can make it increasingly difficult to access education. Christian or ethnic minorities in predominantly Muslim areas are often denied admission to schools and where they are admitted, they are often not given their chosen courses. At university and college, those with Christian names are frequently automatically excluded from getting admission to study courses in medicine, for example. Christians have had to change their names to Muslim names to be admitted. Results and certificates can be withheld for years to frustrate Christians. Some young Christians who cannot get admission into universities and who cannot get jobs, feel forced to leave the country in search of better opportunities.

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

Block 4.14: Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished. (4.00 points)

The issue of impunity is of paramount importance in Nigeria. The perpetrators of attacks against Christians are usually never arrested. A Nigerian analyst affirmed that this is one of the reasons why attacks on Christians and their property keep increasing in number. When attackers are arrested, they are often quickly released; this is common where violence has been carried out by armed Fulani herdsmen or 'bandits' in the context of Islamic militancy.

Block 4.11: Christians have been subjected to smear campaigns or hate speech. (3.75 points)

Nigerian social media has been awash with many hate speech posts against the Church, and many Muslim clerics have made it a point of duty to constantly preach hate against Christians. The immediate past governor of Kaduna was seen on video preaching hate against Christians. Almost all the time the perpetrators of these kinds of smear campaigns are not brought to justice.

Smear campaigns are a very common thing against Christians. During the 2023 general elections, the candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Plateau state was falsely accused of not wanting to operate an inclusive government and that he would sideline Muslims in the state. Also, there was much propaganda against the Presidential candidate of the Labour Party, the former Governor of Anambra State, falsely emphasizing that he also would not operate an inclusive government, and that he would grant the South-east the nation of Biafra which they have been advocating for due to the intense marginalization they have suffered in the country. Also, Christians in the North experience daily abuse and are called all kinds of derogatory names such as 'infidels' etc.

Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.75 points)

As explained by a Nigerian analyst: “Christians have to be very careful in discussions with Muslims as their words can easily be used against them. Christians have been killed when they were accused of speaking ill of Muhammad or Islam. Many opinions spoken by Christians are deliberately misconstrued and regarded as blasphemous. In several instances mobs have killed Christians for simply preaching in public or expressing opinions on issues.” A case in point was the [killing of Christian student](#) Deborah Yakubu in Sokoto in May 2022 (WWR, 27 May 2022). For converts from Islam to Christianity the threat is even bigger.

Block 4.1: The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. (3.50 points)

The Nigerian Constitution provides for freedom of religion. Section 10 of the 1999 Constitution prohibits the adoption of a state religion. Section 15 provides that discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association ties shall be prohibited. However, the adoption of the Sharia legal system by the northern states places Sharia law above of the Constitution and its operation negatively impacts Christians. This question has been scored for the Sharia states only, although the mere existence of the issue has meaning for the way the whole nation is governed.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (4.00 points)

In a climate of ‘agitation’, chaos, impunity and increasingly oppressive Islamization, speaking out against the persecution of Christians is not a safe thing to do - particularly in the areas where outright violence is rife. The space to advocate for justice naturally depends on the advocates’ standing in the community. People with a high public profile have more opportunity than those who are less well-known in the most affected areas. But even for them, such advocacy is not without danger. Several well-known Christians were called for interrogation by the security services after having negatively commented on the situation of insecurity in the country and the weak performance of the federal government in relation thereto.

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.75 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South (see above: *Areas where Christians face most difficulties*). The activities of churches have been disrupted by constant attacks on Christian communities and by the destruction of church-buildings and executions or abductions of pastors and Christians in general. Such actions might have a long-term impact – many Christians do not dare to attend church services anymore and church activities are often cancelled due to the high level of insecurity. Sometimes the security men deployed by the authorities to protect Christian worshippers cannot be trusted and may act as informers or not give any protection. The activities of churches are also monitored, obstructed

or hindered in less intrusive ways from time to time.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. As described above (in: *Security situation*), Christian leaders are, without doubt, a particular target for harassment and kidnapping. For instance, 39 Roman Catholic priests were reported abducted and murdered in 2022 ([The Tablet, 30 October 2023](#)), and 23 were kidnapped in 2023 ([ACN International, 13 November 2023](#)). Harassment has, however, often taken on lighter forms than those leading to abduction or death. Nevertheless, they have still been very disturbing for the pastors and their families, as well as for their church communities.

Block 5.2: It has been difficult to get registration or legal status for churches at any level of government. (3.50 points)

Presently in all the 12 Sharia States, no new churches have been registered, in all these states land is not sold for new churches and even when churches go through the back door to get land they are attacked and the development and registration of the churches are totally hindered and threatened by mob attack from local Muslims. For example, a church in Kirfi, Bauchi state, was asked to stop construction because the roof of the church was higher than all the mosques in the community. Some of the most notorious states include Zamfara, Sokoto, Kano, Kebbi, and Katsina.

In the Sharia states, churches and brothels have equal value, both will never be allowed to operate in some sections of town. Many Christians have to convert their residence to churches and risk the government pulling down such buildings, if the authorities notice that it is being used for Christian activities. Even within federal schools and state institutions in the North, the building of chapels is blocked; even though Christian students have a constitutional provision for a place of worship on campus, these rights are denied by the Muslim state.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced.

Possible reasons for this may be:

- *Doing so would expose them to more attacks. For example, if a family member is killed because of his/her faith, the survivors might decide to keep silent about the circumstances of the killing to avoid provoking any further attacks.*
- *In some circumstances, the reticence to pass on information may be due to the danger of exposure caused by converts returning to their previous faith.*
- *If persecution is related to sexual violence - due to stigma, survivors often do not tell even their closest relatives.*
- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons

- Some incidents never reach the public consciousness, because no one really knows about it; or the incident is simply not considered worth reporting; or media coverage is deliberately blocked or distorted; or media coverage is not deliberately blocked, but the information somehow gets lost; or the incidents are deliberately not reported widely for security reasons (e.g. for the protection of local church leaders).
- In situations where Christians have been discriminated against for many years, armed conflict can make them additionally vulnerable. Christians killed in areas where fighting regularly takes place are unlikely to be reported separately. Examples in recent years have been Sudan, Syria and Myanmar.
- Christians who die through the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care (due to long-term discrimination) are unlikely to be reported separately. Christians are not always killed directly; they can be so squeezed by regulations and other oppressive factors that they die – not at once, but in the course of years. This often includes the deprivation of basic necessities such as clean water and medical care, or exclusion from government assisted socio-economic development projects. These numbers could be immense.

3. The use of symbolic numbers

In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10*, 100* etc.) is given and indicated with an asterisk. A symbolic number of 10* could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100* could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1,000* could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain. The same applies for symbolic numbers 10,000*, 100,000* and 1,000,000*: Each could indicate much higher numbers, but WWL chooses to be cautious because the real number is uncertain.

Nigeria: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	4,118	5,014
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	750	100 *
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	10 *	54
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	3,300	4,726
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	1,000 *	1,000 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	10 *	100 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10,000 *	10,000 *

(Table continued below)

Nigeria: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2024	WWL 2023
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10,000 *	1,000 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1,000 *	1,000 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100,000 *	10,000 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1,000 *	100 *

- **Christians killed:** The number of Christians killed has decreased from 5,014 (in WWL 2023) to 4,118 in the WWL 2024 reporting period - a 18% decrease.
- **Christians abducted:** The number of abductions decreased from 4,726 (WWL 2023) to 3,300 – a 30% decrease. The decrease of killings and abductions of Christians were mainly caused by a temporary drop in violent incidents in the run-up to the elections.
- **Churches attacked:** The number of churches attacked or closed was given the symbolic number 100* in WWL 2023; for the WWL 2024 reporting period the number was 750. This number must be understood to be a very low indication. Apart from direct acts of destruction against churches, the number also includes churches that stopped functioning after village communities were raided or occupied. A large number of Christian villages have been affected. Other mainly rural churches stopped their worship services for fear of attacks.

Behind the bare numbers for the different categories of violence, much more lies hidden from view. A husband or older son killed leaves the wife/mother and younger children behind in a state of great vulnerability. A wife or daughter abducted leaves a man only being able to imagine what might be happening to her – such thoughts torment the mind incessantly. When a (mainly) Christian community is attacked, some are killed, some are injured (often seriously) and others are abducted. The pattern is frequently that men and boys are killed, and women and girls are abducted. Many flee from their homes and fields. Their properties are robbed; their harvests destroyed or possession of their farmland is taken over. When the Christians dare to come back, there is always the fear that it will happen again. Fear reigns: When night falls, there is always the anxiety that another attack could come, and thoughts of what might happen to oneself and one's family. Villagers in some areas often sleep in forest areas at night to avoid attacks. Some communities have been permanently abandoned by their Christian inhabitants and occupied by Fulani militants. The overlap between Fulani militants and so-called 'armed bandits' is considerable. Boko Haram and ISWAP operate slightly differently but the consequences are comparable.

As the [February 2023 report](#) by ORFA clearly shows in its key findings (pp.3-4), violence is acted out in different ways. It is not always that (mainly) Christian villages are attacked. But when that is the case, it is not that the assailants want to kill as many members of the villages as possible;

if so, they would operate differently. It seems that the creation of an atmosphere of terror is the main goal, along with the opportunity to rob other people’s possessions. Or the goal might be simply to take over everything those people have for a specific period of time, if not indefinitely. Abduction is also increasing. Some women and girls are abducted for sexual slavery or forced marriage. Others (men, women) are abducted for ransom often men. Church leaders are a common target, probably because they are expected to be able to raise large sums of money quickly from their congregations or church institutions. Abduction has become a successful ‘revenue model’.

Many Christians live as IDPs. Some find they can survive and carry on, while others suffer a long time lacking everything. Women and children are particularly vulnerable as IDPs: Children are vulnerable to health problems and women and girls to abuse and human trafficking.

A common denominator for the Nigerian Christians (and others) confronted with these different forms of violence, is trauma. Many live with traumatic experiences that have not been dealt with. Such experiences may be personal or when a loved-one has been killed or abducted or otherwise confronted with serious violence. Where such trauma receives no treatment, the resilience of victims and the ability to get on with their lives again is often undermined. This can be the case even where support is in place to take care of the material side of things (which is rare).

5 Year trends

The following three charts show the levels of pressure and violence faced by Christians in the country over the last five WWL reporting periods.

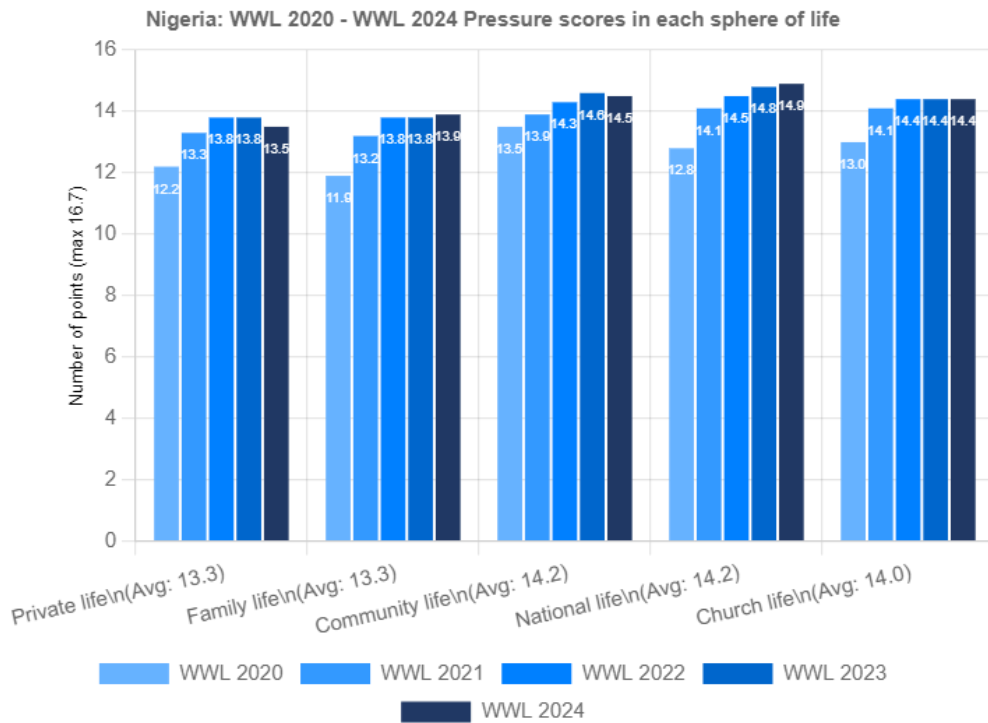
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Nigeria: WWL 2020 - WWL 2024	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2024	14.2
2023	14.3
2022	14.2
2021	13.7
2020	12.7

The average pressure in Nigeria had been increasing over the last few years but stabilized at an extreme level from WWL 2022 onwards. In addition to the reporting periods listed above, the average pressure for WWL 2014 was 11.0 points; for WWL 2015: 12.2 points; for WWL 2016: 12.3 points; for WWL 2017: 12.3 points; for WWL 2018: 12.1 points; for WWL 2019: 12.7 points.

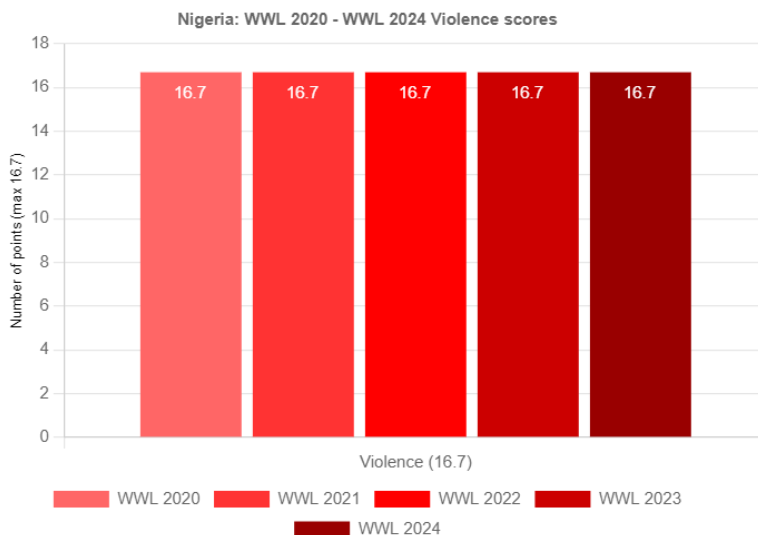
Before former President Buhari came to power in 2015, insecurity in Nigeria had already been increasing at a rapid rate. Yet the ‘agitation’ the Buhari administration caused further deterioration in the country’s situation for all Nigerians and especially for Christians.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



There has been a distinct increase in the scores for pressure in the different spheres of life over the last five WWL reporting periods. The differences between the WWL 2020 and WWL 2024 values is 1.3 points for *Private life*, 2.0 for *Family life*, 1.0 for *Community life*, 2.1 for *National life* and 1.4 for *Church life*. This pattern reflects the increased restrictions against Christians under a gradual process of Islamization which took place under Buhari's presidency. In situations of high levels of jihadist activity, combined with almost total impunity, non-violent forms of hostility against Christians (and others) rise too.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians



The score for violence has remained at maximum level for the past five reporting periods. In previous reporting periods, the score for violence in WWL 2014 was 15.6 points; in WWL 2015: 16.7 points; in WWL 2016: 16.7 points; in WWL 2017: 16.1 points; in WWL 2018: 16.5 points; in WWL 2019: 16.7 points.

Over the last 11 WWL reporting periods, the score for violence in Nigeria has 7 times been the maximum score (16.7 points). As described above in the Section on Violence, behind these scores a world of suffering is hidden. Indeed, the number of Christians killed in Nigeria has been the bulk of the global totals for Christians killed for many years. This is not only linked to the size of the Church - the number of Christians even in the north of Nigeria is quite large - but above all to the dynamics of unceasing jihadist violence in the country.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, the situation of Christian women and girls continues to be dire. Raids by Boko Haram and the splinter group ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed ‘bandits’ have terrorized Christian communities. Women and girls have been raped, forced into sexual slavery, kidnapped for ransom and killed. There is a general practice of treating women as inferior to men, in rural regions especially, which makes their maltreatment easier. Women and girls are especially vulnerable to sexual violence in IDP camps. A country expert commented on their 2022 research: “The banditry, Fulani militia activity and herdsmen attacks have subjected a lot of Christian young women and girls to rape. In our interviews during our numerous visits to internally displaced persons camps, as high as fifty to sixty percent of the women and girls in the camps have been either raped by bandits or kidnappers. Apart from what happened in the camps, about eighty percent of kidnapped victims that are women have been raped by their captors.”

Abduction is used regularly to impoverish Christian families. Christian girls are sometimes abducted to be trafficked by radical Islamic religious leaders for the purpose of forced conversion and forced marriage – even women who are already married. A country expert comments: “Of late, emirs have provided a special covering for abductors of minors. They collect the minors from the abductors and convert them to Islam, then marry them off to willing Muslims, who often rape the minors to impregnate them. The emirs act like their parents, while

their biological parents are denied access to them." When parents try to rescue their child, they commonly face resistance from the community, police and judiciary, who argue that the marriage is legitimate under Islamic law and the girl has accepted Islam. In addition to being "married", girls abducted by militants have reportedly been used as human shields or as leverage in negotiations with the government or their families.

The fear that something will happen with their Christian daughters causes many Christian parents to push for early marriage as a kind of protection. This, alongside laws permitting under-age marriage in some states, contributes to the high early marriage rate for girls (Girls Not Brides Nigeria). Some Christian parents also choose to keep their girls at home, due to the dangers girls face travelling to and at school; this compounds the dependency of women and girls on men and fosters illiteracy about their rights. School abductions have also led to parents sending their daughters to safer states for education. Those remaining in schools in northern states are forced to wear Islamic code uniforms; the wearing of hijab, for instance, is compulsory for all female students in Sharia-run states.

When women are raped, their husbands can sometimes struggle to move past the trauma – they may even view their wife as dirty or impure, particularly if pregnant. Many homes have broken up because of this. When girls are abducted, a deep sadness falls upon the family. Men often see it as their fault for not protecting their children adequately. The victims themselves, too, carry scars and trauma for a very long time, and can be stigmatized by communities. Christian communities therefore end up deeply fractured and there have been [calls for a greater response](#) to gender-based violence (Daily Trust, 23 October 2022). The high rate of killings of Christian men also causes many dependent wives and children to fall into poverty or flee for safety.

Particularly in the Hausa ethnic group, the general perception is that women are not supposed to work outside the home or fend for themselves. Generally, poverty can also make women and girls more vulnerable to pressure from perpetrators. In addition to the great emotional toll and social cost of violations, in some communities where widows are the main financial providers (possibly widowed due to persecution targeting their husbands), such violations also affect the community's economic well-being.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Economic harassment via business/job/work access; Economic harassment via fines
Political and Legal	-
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, Christian men and boys are often specifically targeted and killed by non-state actors including Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed 'bandits'. Much of this violence happens through attacks on Christian communities in rural areas and at roadblocks. These killings not only serve to eliminate the current generation of men and boys, but also guarantees a considerable fall in the birthrate of Christian families. A country expert comments: "A lot of [men and boys] are paying the supreme price for their faith on a daily basis."

For those who survive such attacks, abduction and forced inclusion in militant ranks remain a threat. There are many reports of church leaders being abducted for ransom.

Christian men and boys have also been strategically marginalized in terms of education and employment. They are increasingly excluded from gaining admission to schools or universities, and are unlikely to gain employment within the Civil Service in Sharia states and sometimes even at federal level, even if highly qualified. They can also be fined or detained unlawfully. The ensuing combination of frustration and multiple dangers causes many young men to leave the country in search of safety and better opportunities.

The combination of violence and pressure has a devastating effect on the Church and Christian families. If a man is killed, loses his ability to work or has his property seized, his family can become impoverished. The vulnerability of the family is a living testimony of the overwhelming power of the perpetrators. This is particularly evident in how perpetrators are almost never brought to justice.

Violence against women is also used as a weapon to harm Christian men. Men and boys have been forced to watch their wives, mothers, daughters and sisters be raped in front of them, or abducted, causing deep trauma and feelings of helplessness, as they feel they should have been able to protect them.

Persecution of other religious minorities

Adherents of ATR

Adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) are known to face attacks and abductions. According to a report published by the Observatory on Religious Freedom in Africa in February 2023, the number attacked and killed in 2019-2022 was 40, and the number abducted was 133 ([ORFA, Killings and Abductions in Nigeria 2019-2022](#), Appendix 1C, p.29 and Appendix 3C, p.35).

Muslim community

Muslims who are not part of a militant group attacking communities, are also vulnerable to attack. Especially in north-western and north-central states, many Muslims have been killed and/or abducted by the same groups that killed and/or abducted Christians, and also had to flee their villages. (See ORFA report mentioned above.)

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2022 Nigeria):

- "Violence erupted on February 3 [2022] in Ijagbo, Kwara State, over the state-sponsored Baptist High School's refusal to allow Muslim students to wear hijabs in school. Muslim

youths clashed with CAN supporters at the school. Police eventually used tear gas to break up the crowd, but one Muslim youth was reportedly shot outside the school's fence and approximately 50 Christians and Muslims were injured, some seriously. ... On June 17, ... the Supreme Court ruled the constitution allowed Muslim students to wear hijabs in all state-sponsored or affiliated schools."

- "On August 8 [2022], according to the IMN (Islamic Movement in Nigeria), security forces fired on a procession during Ashura, in Zaria, Kaduna State, killing six Shia Muslims. The IMN said the security forces were acting under order of Kaduna State Governor Nasir El Rufai. Prominent Shia Muslim organizations such as Rassulah Aa'azam Foundation blamed the IMN for creating an image that all Shia are antigovernment separatists. ... The government's proscription of the IMN as an illegal political organization remained in place, while other non-IMN Shia groups continued their activities without hindrance, according to the Rassulah Aa'azam Foundation, the largest Shia religious organization in the country."
- In September [2022], gunmen kidnapped dozens of worshippers attending Friday afternoon prayers at a mosque in Zugu town, Zamfara State. A resident who was at the mosque told *Reuters* that "the gunmen hid guns under their garments and pretended to be worshippers. On entering the mosque compound, they pulled out their weapons and fired in the air, forcing people to run for cover. The gunmen took dozens of worshippers and force-marched them to an unknown place."

Future outlook

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of the blend of 4 Persecution engines ('Very strong'):

Islamic oppression, Ethno-religious hostility, Dictatorial paranoia and Organized corruption and crime

The overall threat for the Church in Nigeria - and for most of the country's population - is rooted in the restrictions Christians face under the increasing Islamization in the country. This is not new but grew considerably during the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari, who claimed in 2001 during a seminar in Kaduna that he would "continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria". He then added that, 'God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country'." (See above: *Persecution engines*.)

This country dossier shows that the level of 'agitation' has become very high. Other organizations have seen this too: The International Committee On Nigeria (ICON), together with the International Organization on Peace-building & Social Justice (PSJ), published a report in 2020 entitled "[Nigeria's Silent Slaughter](#)", claiming that genocide is taking place in Nigeria. Some agree with this terminology, others are slightly more cautious in how they frame the situation in the country. However, all are convinced that Nigeria is in the grip of an inhumane dynamic, that victimizes many civilians - and Christians in particular.

The [February 2023 report](#) of the newly established Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa has a slightly different approach in that it has tried to be comprehensive in its registration of incidents involving killings and abductions. It counted killings and abductions of civilians and

their religious backgrounds, of the security forces and of 'Terror Groups'.

ORFA states (page 7): "The report distinguishes between the religious background of the civilian victims because a variety of contradictory analyses exists concerning the causes of violence in Nigeria. Some analyses blame everything on a 'classical' herder-farmer conflict made worse by environmental degradation in the wider region. Other analyses see as the exclusive guiding theme the vision of Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani radical Islamic scholar who began an Islamic jihad in Gobir in 1804, and by 1808 had established the Sokoto Caliphate. He had vowed to enforce Islam through the power of the sword from the Sahara Desert in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the south.

ORFA is not taking sides. The Observatory wants to let the data speak for itself without purposefully steering towards one or other of the narratives mentioned above."

ORFA (page 3): "Overall findings based on Sections 1 to 4:

- Most attacks by 'Terror Groups' are against geographic communities, and these are more often Christian communities than Muslim communities. Apart from causing direct harm, these attacks also destabilize communities, negatively affecting the survival of the victims, in particular Christians.
- 'Terror Groups' frequently engage in abductions. In this way they put additional pressure on civilians and religious communities, impoverishing them by demanding (excessive) ransom payments, and by creating serious trauma, while financing their own destructive operations. It applies for all, but Christians and churches are most often their victims."

Desert encroachment is also a factor impacting Nigeria. While 'climate change' and environmental degradation have been used as excuses for violations of freedoms in Nigeria ('persecution eclipse'), its continuous effects will further complicate the turbulent situation in the country.

If the current insecurity continues, a situation of all-out chaos may be inevitable. Out of this chaos a new Nigeria might emerge, but one built on the foundation of violent jihadism and other sources of violence that accompany it. Such a scenario would not only be disastrous for the Church in Nigeria and for the country itself, but also for the entire region.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: RLPB 678 - <https://rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com/2023/01/rlpb-678-nigerian-elections-1-candidates.html>
- Drivers of persecution description: persecution eclipse - <https://www.opendoors.org/research-reports/wwl-documentation/WWL-Discussion-of-Key-Themes-update-October-2023.pdf>
- Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 points): grossly inadequate - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Nigeria-Assessment-of-Christian-situation-in-4-north-eastern-states-June-2017.pdf>
- Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.75 points): killing of Christian student - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/nigeria-blasphemy-killing-mere-public-disturbance/>
- Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points): The Tablet, 30 October 2023 - <https://www.thetablet.co.uk/news/17794/clergy-are-soft-targets-in-nigeria-s-kidnapping-industry>

- Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points): ACN International, 13 November 2023 - <https://acninternational.org/kidnapping-of-priests-remains-rampant-in-nigeria/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: February 2023 report - <https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Nigeria-Killings-and-Abduction-10-2019%E2%80%932021%E2%80%93final.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: calls for a greater response - <https://dailytrust.com/orno-adamawa-yobe-recorded-5623-sexual-violence-in-four-years-report/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: ORFA, Killings and Abductions in Nigeria 2019-2022 - <https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/230217-ORFA-Killings-and-Abductions-in-Nigeria-2019-2022.pdf>
- Future outlook: Nigeria's Silent Slaughter - <https://iconhelp.org/silent-slaughter/>
- Future outlook: February 2023 report - <https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/230901-ORFA-Killings-and-Abductions-in-Nigeria-2019-2022.pdf>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

- <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/>.

As in earlier years, these are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Nigeria>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>.

A selection of the WWR reports available:

- [Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Short version 2018](#)
- [Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 1 – 2018](#)
- [Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 2 \(appendices\) – 2018](#)
- [Nigeria – Benue State – Short version – 2017](#)
- [Nigeria – Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” \(2014-2016\) with update: January-August 2017 – 2017](#)
- [Nigeria – Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State – 2016](#)
- [Nigeria – Violent Conflict in Taraba State \(2013 – 2015\) – 2015](#)
- [Nigeria – Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies – 2015](#)

External Links - Further useful reports

- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Short version 2018 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Nigeria-Southern-Kaduna-Short-version-2018.pdf>
- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 1 – 2018 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Nigeria-Southern-Kaduna-Volume-1-FINAL.pdf>
- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 2 (appendices) – 2018 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Nigeria-Southern-Kaduna-Volume-2.pdf>
- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Benue State – Short version – 2017 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Nigeria-Benue-State-Short-version-WWR-2017.pdf>

- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” (2014-2016) with update: January-August 2017 – 2017 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Nigeria-Benue-State-2017-WWR.pdf>
- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State – 2016 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Nigeria-Investigating-common-narratives-of-violent-conflict-in-Nasarawa-State-2016.pdf>
- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Violent Conflict in Taraba State (2013 – 2015) – 2015 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Violent-Conflict-in-Taraba-State-2013-2015.pdf>
- Further useful reports: Nigeria – Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies – 2015 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Migration-and-Violent-Conflict-in-Divided-Societies-March-2015.pdf>