

World
Watch
Research

Nigeria: Country Dossier

January 2021



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2021

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	94	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.2	94	93	94	93	89
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.3	9.8	92	92	91	91	91
4	Libya	15.6	15.4	15.9	16.3	16.3	12.4	92	90	87	86	78
5	Pakistan	13.9	14.2	15.1	14.9	13.5	16.7	88	88	87	86	88
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	11.1	88	87	86	86	82
7	Yemen	16.6	16.6	16.5	16.7	16.7	3.9	87	85	86	85	85
8	Iran	14.5	14.5	13.9	15.7	16.5	10.6	86	85	85	85	85
9	Nigeria	13.3	13.2	13.9	14.1	14.1	16.7	85	80	80	77	78
10	India	13.0	12.9	13.5	14.9	13.7	15.4	83	83	83	81	73
11	Iraq	13.6	14.6	14.2	14.8	13.8	11.5	82	76	79	86	86
12	Syria	13.3	13.9	13.5	14.5	14.0	12.0	81	82	82	76	86
13	Sudan	13.4	13.4	13.7	13.6	15.7	9.1	79	85	87	87	87
14	Saudi Arabia	15.1	13.9	14.4	15.8	16.6	2.2	78	79	77	79	76
15	Maldives	15.4	15.5	13.9	15.8	16.6	0.4	77	78	78	78	76
16	Egypt	12.5	13.2	11.5	12.7	11.0	14.1	75	76	76	70	65
17	China	12.6	9.7	12.0	13.2	15.4	11.1	74	70	65	57	57
18	Myanmar	11.9	12.0	13.1	12.9	12.3	11.9	74	73	71	65	62
19	Vietnam	12.1	8.8	12.7	14.0	14.5	10.0	72	72	70	69	71
20	Mauritania	14.3	14.0	13.5	14.1	13.6	1.9	71	68	67	57	55
21	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	1.3	71	73	74	73	71
22	Laos	12.1	10.2	13.6	13.5	14.3	6.9	71	72	71	67	64
23	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.5	70	70	69	68	67
24	Algeria	13.9	13.9	11.5	13.1	13.4	3.9	70	73	70	58	58
25	Turkey	12.5	11.5	10.8	13.3	11.6	9.3	69	63	66	62	57
26	Tunisia	12.0	13.1	10.4	11.5	13.2	7.4	67	64	63	62	61
27	Morocco	12.6	13.5	11.2	12.4	14.1	3.7	67	66	63	51	49
28	Mali	9.4	8.2	12.7	10.3	11.5	15.4	67	66	68	59	59
29	Qatar	14.0	13.9	10.8	13.1	14.1	1.5	67	66	62	63	66
30	Colombia	11.4	8.8	12.4	11.0	9.7	13.9	67	62	58	56	53
31	Bangladesh	11.5	10.3	13.0	11.3	10.1	10.6	67	63	58	58	63
32	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.0	9.4	11.8	14.3	67	66	48	-	-
33	Tajikistan	14.0	12.3	11.9	12.5	13.2	2.2	66	65	65	65	58
34	Nepal	12.4	9.7	9.9	13.0	12.3	8.5	66	64	64	64	53
35	CAR	9.0	8.6	13.1	9.6	9.9	15.6	66	68	70	61	58
36	Ethiopia	9.9	8.5	10.7	10.3	10.8	14.4	65	63	65	62	64
37	Mexico	10.3	8.1	12.4	10.7	10.3	12.6	64	60	61	59	57
38	Jordan	13.1	13.9	11.4	11.6	12.4	2.0	64	64	65	66	63
39	Brunei	13.9	14.6	10.7	10.9	13.5	0.7	64	63	63	64	64
40	DRC	8.0	7.9	11.2	9.4	11.6	16.1	64	56	55	33	-
41	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	11.0	12.5	13.4	2.4	64	64	63	63	56
42	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.0	12.3	15.7	64	60	54	38	-
43	Bhutan	13.1	12.1	11.9	12.7	13.8	0.0	64	61	64	62	61
44	Oman	13.2	13.5	10.3	12.5	13.0	0.9	63	62	59	57	53
45	Mozambique	9.3	7.6	11.3	7.9	11.1	16.1	63	43	43	-	-
46	Malaysia	12.1	14.3	12.9	11.5	10.0	2.4	63	62	60	65	60
47	Indonesia	11.5	11.4	12.4	10.7	9.3	7.8	63	60	65	59	55
48	Kuwait	13.2	13.5	9.9	12.2	13.2	1.1	63	62	60	61	57
49	Kenya	11.7	9.2	10.5	8.0	10.3	12.8	62	61	61	62	68
50	Comoros	12.5	11.1	11.4	11.3	14.2	1.9	62	57	56	56	56

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017
51	Cuba	10.9	7.7	11.8	12.9	13.4	5.4	62	52	49	49	47
52	Sri Lanka	12.2	9.1	11.7	12.2	9.7	7.0	62	65	58	57	55
53	UAE	13.4	13.3	9.7	12.0	12.4	1.1	62	60	58	58	55
54	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.6	10.6	62	60	52	45	47
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.2	10.4	12.0	1.3	58	57	56	54	48
56	Palestinian Territories	12.5	13.3	9.1	10.4	11.7	0.9	58	60	57	60	64
57	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	10.2	58	55	52	53	59
58	Russian Federation	12.3	8.0	10.2	10.5	12.1	3.9	57	60	60	51	46
59	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.0	56	56	56	56	57
60	Bahrain	12.1	12.5	9.1	10.7	10.5	0.9	56	55	55	57	54
61	Azerbaijan	12.8	9.8	9.4	11.1	12.6	0.0	56	57	57	57	52
62	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	3.7	53	56	48	40	-
63	Nicaragua	6.9	4.6	9.9	11.3	10.0	8.1	51	41	41	-	-
64	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.9	48	48	43	-	-
65	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	12.0	47	48	47	46	53
66	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	5.9	47	45	46	-	-
67	Honduras	6.8	5.0	10.6	7.6	9.0	7.6	46	39	38	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	10.1	11.4	7.2	46	43	42	-	-
69	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.0	43	44	44	-	-
70	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	0.6	43	43	43	-	-
71	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	9.8	0.7	43	41	42	-	-
72	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	8.1	42	42	41	-	-
73	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.3	42	42	43	-	-
74	El Salvador	6.6	4.9	9.8	4.2	8.7	7.8	42	38	30	-	-

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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).
- The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.
- The WWL 2021 reporting period was 01 October 2019 - 30 September 2020.
- 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 including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

Effect on data-gathering during COVID-19 pandemic

In the WWL 2021 reporting period, travel restrictions and other measures introduced by the governments of various countries to combat the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic did cause delays and create the need for restructuring grass-roots research in some cases. Through the agile cooperation of Open Doors field networks, research analysts, external experts and an increased use of technological options, Open Doors is confident that the WWL 2021 scoring, analysis and documentation has maintained required levels of quality and reliability.

External Links - Introduction

- Sources and definitions: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>

WWL 2021 Short country profile / Nigeria

Brief country details

Nigeria: Population (2020 UN estimate)	Christians	Chr%
206,153,000	95,358,000	46.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Nigeria: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	85	9
WWL 2020	80	12
WWL 2019	80	12
WWL 2018	77	14
WWL 2017	78	12

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

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, One's own (extended) family, Organized crime cartels or networks, Political parties, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, 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, Political parties, Organized crime cartels or networks, Ethnic group leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Non-Christian religious leaders, Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) , Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Organized corruption and crime	Violent religious groups, Government officials, Organized crime cartels or networks, Ethnic group leaders, 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, by violent and non-violent means.

During the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari (beginning in 2015), Islamic militant violence increased. In addition to what already was happening, the government has allowed brutal acts of violence to continue with impunity of which many Nigerians are victims, but most particularly Christians. 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 is also spreading to the south. Such violence often causes loss of life, physical injury as well as loss of property. As a result of the violence, Christians are also being dispossessed of their land and means of livelihood.

Christians in northern Nigeria, especially in the Sharia states, face discrimination and exclusion as second-class citizens. Christians with a Muslim background also face rejection from their own families and pressure to give up Christianity. Further, since 2015, President Buhari's Federal Government has appointed mostly northern Muslims to certain critical offices, including security agencies like the army, air-force, police, Immigration service, DSS, customs, Civil Defence Corps, prison service etc. The same applies increasingly for the judiciary in Nigeria. The challenge in all this is the official policy of denial of religious freedom violations against Christians by the government.

This process of Islamization happens against the background of climate change, environmental degradation and population growth, pushing the Fulani herdsmen with their cattle southwards to the Middle Belt and to the southern parts of Nigeria. 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 of Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed bandits, the narrative becomes confusing, and the risk of [persecution eclipse](#) arises (see: WWL - Discussion of key themes, October 2019, p.13). Persecution eclipse is furthered by classifying what is happening in the country as 'sectarian violence', 'communal clashes' or 'civil unrest'.

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)
- Christians women are raped, gangraped and sexually abused (ICCPR Art. 7)
- Christian children are forced to adhere to Islamic religious precepts in the Northern states (ICCPR Art. 18 and CRC Art. 14)
- Converts to Christianity suffer from discrimination and violence in the Northern states (ICCPR Arts. 18 and 26)
- Christians are accused and charged with blasphemy in Northern states (ICCPR Art. 19)

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

The examples given are taken from a joint research project with two Nigerian partner organizations, the [Kukah Centre](#) and the [Para-Mallam Peace Foundation](#). The information is based on primary data from their networks or checked by their networks after publication by Nigerian or international media.

18 January 2020: Boko Haram attacked Kwaragilum village in Chibok Local Government Area (LGA), Borno State. They killed 26 people and abducted 6 Christian women. (Source: [CSW, 3 July 2020](#))

23-25 April 2020: Fulani militants killed 13 Christians and kidnapped 13 others in attacks in Kaduna State. The attacks on five villages in the counties of Kajuru and Chikun in Kaduna state displaced more than 1,000 people from their homes. Those killed were members of Evangelical Church Winning All (ECWA), Catholic, Baptist, United Church of Christ in Nations (HEKAN) or Assemblies of God churches. (Source: [Southern Kaduna People's Union / SOKAPU](#), published by Morning Star News, 4 May 2020)

11-13 May 2020: Attacks on Katul, Idanu-Doka and Ungwan Rana-Doka occurred on the same day that victims of an armed assault by Fulani militants on the Gona Rogo community were buried in a mass grave. On 11 May at least seventeen people were killed, six were injured, food stores were destroyed, and homes burnt during an attack on the predominantly Baptist community that began at 11.30pm. Among the victims was an entire family of five. Seven of the victims were minors. A six-month old baby who was hit in the head by the bullet that killed his mother, was taken to hospital. Survivors informed SOKAPU that a neighboring Fulani community which had been in the area for 40 years quietly left the night before the attack occurred. These attacks were part of a series of coordinated assaults on Christian communities in the southern part of Kaduna State by armed assailants of Fulani origin which continue despite the imposition of a COVID-19 related lockdown. (Source: Primary data, SOKAPU)

June 2020: In June 2020, there was a case in the Magistrate court in Birnin Yauri that was filed by the District Head about two brothers who sold their fathers' land to the Apostolic Church for the purpose of building a pastor's house with the consent of their father. Surprisingly, the two brothers were reported to the Nigerian Police Force, and the police took them to court for criminal conspiracy and disturbance of the public peace. (Marginalization Against the Church, Christian Association of Nigeria, Yelwa Kebbi State.)

13 August 2020: In Ngaski LGA, Kebbi State the Christian Association of Nigeria wrote a letter of complaint to the local authorities on Religious Marginalization; The Challenges of Christians in Ngaski Local Government: In the letter the Chairman stated "Christians have faced a lot of challenges from village and district heads of Birnin Yauri and Ngaski Areas for years. We have been seeking permission to build churches in different places but were denied access". In the letter he listed many difficulties faced by the Church in those local governments including: "The abduction and hiding of our girls in the name of giving them out for marriage to Muslims. On Tuesday the 11th of August, 2020, a young Christian girl of about 15-16 years was married to a Muslim man at the Emirs' Palace in Yauri. The girl was forcefully taken away from her parents since the 2nd of June 2020." (Letter of Complaint, Christian Association of Nigeria, Ngaski LGA, Warrah Kebbi State, August 2020.)

Specific examples of positive developments

ICC inquiry into Nigeria: Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda of the International Criminal Court has called for a [formal inquiry](#) to begin into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Nigeria. According to the prosecutor, the conflict has 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, has now concluded that the "criteria for opening an investigation into the situation in Nigeria have been met".

Nigeria, Country of particular Concern: Michael R. Pompeo, 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."

External Links - Short country profile

- Brief description of the persecution situation: persecution eclipse - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WWL-Discussion-of-key-themes-October-2019.pdf>
- 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: Kukah Centre - <https://thekukahcentre.org/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Para-Mallam Peace Foundation - <https://paramallampeacefoundation.org/>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: CSW, 3 July 2020 - <https://www.csw.org.uk/2020/07/03/press/4712/article.htm>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: Southern Kaduna People's Union / SOKAPU - <https://morningstarnews.org/2020/05/muslim-fulani-herdsmen-kill-13-christians-kidnap-13-others-in-kaduna-state-nigeria/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: formal inquiry - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55277712>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Nigeria - <https://www.state.gov/united-states-takes-action-against-violators-of-religious-freedom-2/>

WWL 2021: Keys to understanding / Nigeria

Link for general background information

- [Nigeria country profile - BBC News](#)

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 protectorates and colonies in the region. After the amalgamation of these various colonies and protectorates in 1914, the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria came into existence.

Since gaining independence in 1960, 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. The transition that had eluded Nigeria for more than a decade and half was made possible partly due to the sudden death of the military dictator General Sani Abacha. Upon his death, his successor, General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar, oversaw a quick transition to civilian rule and promulgated a new Constitution.

It needs to be noted that in the 1999 Constitution of secular Nigeria, the word “Islam” as a religion is mentioned 28 times and the word “Muslim” 10 times. Yet, Christianity, Christian, Church or canonical courts are never mentioned once.

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, which is 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. The administration of President Buhari claims that Boko Haram has been defeated in military terms. 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). In a recent twist, the Chief of Army Staff alluded to the fact that it will take the Nigerian Army another twenty years to defeat the Boko Haram insurgents.

In the course of time the situation has become very complex in Nigeria's six political zones. Violence in the North-east was/is mainly perpetrated by Boko Haram, and after the split-off also by ISWAP. In the North-west there were/are the armed bandits. In the Middle Belt including Kaduna State, there were/are the Fulani militants. In the recent past, the circles of influence of these different groups are increasingly overlapping, including their agendas. Boko Haram's Shekau, having made a rigorous [shift in attitude](#) (HumAngle, 12 July 2020), is at least partly responsible for this: He has been trying to create alliances with all sorts of groups in the North (including the Middle Belt) – such alliances include adherence to his radical Islamic agenda which is 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. (It is likely that this project of an ‘Islamic state’ would also include parts of neighboring countries where Boko Haram and other groups are active.) In the South-west there is already violence being perpetrated by Fulani militants and land grabbing. This is increasingly happening in the South-east too.

This has led to a devastating combination of violent incidents: Raids on predominantly Christian communities, abductions, sexual violence, road block killings, etc. This violence affects all Nigerians but affects Christians in the country disproportionately. 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). Amidst all this, the incapacity or unwillingness of the Federal government and several State governments to protect their citizens, is striking (notwithstanding the examples of courageous state governors who try to do their best to protect the citizens in their responsibility, sometimes in extremely difficult circumstances).

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 are perceived as being dominant in 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 and a serious problem in Nigeria both at national and federal level.

Christians have repeatedly been the targets of attacks and victims of severe violations of their fundamental rights. However, since the current APC government came to power, the attacks have been more aggressive and daring. APC came into power in 2015 after defeating the PDP, a party considered more inclusive and sympathetic to Christian concerns. APC has offered no apology for being a pro-Islamic party, which it denies. Since coming to power, Christians are not only contending with the attacks from Boko Haram, but also from ISWAP and armed Fulani herdsmen. The government has taken no concrete action to contain the spread of attacks carried out by Fulani militants and armed bandits which have been devastating Christian communities. There is no doubt that Muslims also suffer in the spreading violence, but what Christians are experiencing is an existential threat if this trend of attacks continues.

Since 2015, President Buhari's Federal Government has appointed Muslims to certain critical offices, including security agencies like the army, air-force, police, Immigration service, DSS, customs, Civil Defence Corps, prison service etc. The same applies for the judiciary in Nigeria. This is not only limited to positions within the Federal government, but increasingly extends to Federal controlled agencies within state governments. This is also the case in southern, Christian majority states. A disproportionate number of the directors are Muslims. This makes it increasingly difficult for Christians to defend their rights in those states.

On 25 November 2019, the Chief Justice of Nigeria, a Muslim, made a public statement (published in Nigerian newspapers) to the effect that Muslims can now use their numerical strength in the judiciary and legislature to amend the Constitution and extend the remit of Sharia law. This has drawn intense criticism from secular and Christian commentators. On 12 December 2019, the Chief Justice of Nigeria asked that Sharia be taught in Arabic in Nigeria's universities.

President Muhammadu Buhari signed the Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020 (CAMA, 2020) into law on the 7th of August. The enactment of CAMA 2020 has generated a lot of controversy particularly with the provisions of Section 839 which allows the Corporate Affairs Commission to take over institutions registered under the Incorporated Trustee Provisions of the Act. Several Christian denominations have 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 Christians Association of Nigeria (CAN) firmly [rejected the law](#) (AciAfrica, 21 August 2020).

Nigeria's legal structure on marriage makes Christian girls vulnerable for abduction and forced marriage, especially in the context of Sharia law and violence by Islamic militants such as Boko Haram and ISWAP, as well as by Fulani militants and armed bandits who seem to pursue a comparable agenda. This is even worse for female converts from Christianity to Islam. Sometimes even married women are the victims. Added to this, divorce can easily be carried out when a man or women converts from Islam to Christianity, often entailing loss of custody over the children. Finally, with the emphasis on killing men and older boys, there are many Christian widows in the northern part of the country, including the Middle Belt. A Christian widow may lose her children to Muslim relatives to be raised as Muslims, even when she has raised them previously as Christians.

Outlined by a [2019 OECD report](#), there are multiple marital regimes (civil, customary and Islamic) operating concurrently and lacking uniformity (OECD, 2019, “Social Institutions and Gender Index: Nigeria”). The Federal government has no jurisdiction over Islamic or customary marriages and as such early marriage and polygamy are widespread. Laws are particularly confining for women and girls in the North, where Sharia has been implemented. Nigeria ratified the CEDAW Convention in 1985 and the Optional Protocol in 2004, but was criticized in a [2017](#) 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”). In this environment, it is useful to note that just [3.38%](#) of seats in Parliament are held by women (Index Mundi, accessed 4 January 2021).

Domestic violence within marriages is widespread; in the Islamic North 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 (2019 OECD report). Divorce laws prevent women and girls from escaping an abusive situation. Under Islamic law, women are not entitled to initiate a divorce. A man on the other hand, has the right to divorce his wife by *talaq*, requiring him simply to repeat the word ‘talaq’ three times. Sharia also denies women equal custody and guardian rights (OECD, 2019).

Religious landscape

Nigeria: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	95,358,000	46.3
Muslim	95,300,000	46.2
Hindu	36,000	0.0
Buddhist	10,700	0.0

Ethno-religionist	14,800,000	7.2
Jewish	1,200	0.0
Bahai	48,200	0.0
Atheist	53,000	0.0
Agnostic	520,000	0.3
Other	25,900	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

Nigeria is a religious and ethnically diverse nation with a religious fault-line: The southern part of Nigeria is predominantly Christian while northern Nigeria is predominantly Muslim. This harks back to the restrictions placed on missionary activity in northern Nigeria during colonial times and the dominance of Muslim traders operating in the northern parts of the country before and during the colonial period. This regional religious divide also partly coincides with the ethnic divide in Nigeria. Among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria are predominantly Muslim, the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria are mainly Christian, while the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria have both a significant Muslim and Christian population.

Religion plays a pivotal role in Nigerian society. According to WCD 2020 estimates, 46.2% of the population is Muslim, while 46.3% is Christian. Even though Nigeria is constitutionally a secular state with freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution, for nearly 40 years the northern ruling elite have been giving preferential treatment to Muslims and discriminating against Christians. Since 1999, Sharia law has been imposed in 12 northern states much to the resentment of Christians, causing a very high level of concern. Also, in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, including southern Kaduna State, Fulani militants are killing and displacing Christians and taking over their farmland. Little has been done to stop the violations against Christians in these areas.

Although there is a religious fault-line between northern and southern Nigeria, the situation is not as clear-cut as it seems. There are many Christians in the North and Middle Belt, and many Muslims living in the South. The total of Christians and Muslims is 92.5% of the population. The 7.2% Ethno-religionists are spread over 32 of the 37 political entities of the country. The Muslim population percentage can be directly derived from the Christian population percentage, as detailed below:

- The 12 northern Sharia states (Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara) have 11,750,000 Christians (15%) out of a population of 78,364,000. Muslims are ≤85%.

- The 7 Middle Belt states (Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba) have 15,150,000 Christians (50%) out of a population of 30,067,000. Muslims are ≤50%.
- The 17 southern states (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Rivers) have 67,632,000 Christians (71%) out of a population of 95,658,000. Muslims are ≤29%.
- The Abuja FCT has a Christian population of 40%: 826,000 Christians out of a population of 2,064,000. Muslims are ≤60%.

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

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 are limited by poverty and corruption.

According to [World Bank's October 2019 update](#):

- **Economic growth:** "Since 2015, economic growth remains muted. Growth averaged 1.9% in 2018 and remained stable at 2% in the first half of 2019. ... On the production side, growth in 2019 was primarily driven by services, particularly telecoms. Agricultural growth remains below potential due to continued insurgency in the Northeast and ongoing farmer-herdsmen conflicts. ... Given that the economy is expected to grow more slowly than the population, living standards are expected to worsen."
- **Inflation:** 10.2%
- **Poverty headcount ration at national poverty lines:** 40.1% of population. "Growth is too low to lift the bottom half of the population out of poverty. The weakness of the agriculture sector weakens prospects for the rural poor, while high food inflation adversely impacts the livelihoods of the urban poor."
- **Unemployment:** "Despite expansion in some sectors, employment creation remains weak and insufficient to absorb the fast-growing labor force, resulting in a high rate of unemployment (23% in 2018), with another 20% of the labor force underemployed."

According to [World Bank's blog published on 22 September 2020](#):

- **COVID-19:** "Nigeria is currently focused on ways to mitigate the health and economic costs of the COVID-19 pandemic and the simultaneous collapse of international oil prices. These two disruptions threaten to deprive the public sector of the resources necessary to sustain its most crucial social and economic activities. A sudden increase in spending coupled with a steep decline in fiscal revenue have caused economic downturn and financing imbalances."

As indicated in the World Bank October 2019 update, the violent attacks on farmers in northern Nigeria, including the Middle Belt, the fear for abductions, 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.

Social and cultural landscape

According to the [UNDP 2019 report](#) on page 300 and the [World Factbook](#) (February 2019):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hausa 27.4%, Igbo (Ibo), 14.1%, Yoruba 13.9%, Fulani 6.3%, Tiv 2.2%, Ibibio 2.2%, Ijaw/Izon 2%, Kanuri/Berberi, 1.7%, Igala 1%, other 28.9%, unspecified .2% (2013 est.)
- **Main languages:** English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, over 500 additional indigenous languages
- **Urban population:** 50.3% of total population (2018)
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.23%
- **Literacy rate (adult, ages 15 and older):** 51.1%
- **Expected years of schooling:** 9.7 years (female - 8.6; male - 10.1)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 6.5 years (female - 5.3; male - 7.6)

According to [World Bank's October 2019 update](#) and [Country profile \(2018\)](#):

- **Population:** 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 13 October 2020: "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.")
- **Population growth:** 2.6% (2018 estimate)
- **Median age:** 18.1 years
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 54 years
- **Inequality:** "Inequality in terms of income and opportunities has been growing rapidly and has adversely affected poverty reduction. The North-South divide has widened in recent years due to the Boko Haram insurgency and a lack of economic development in the northern part of the country."

According to [UNHCR's Global Focus, 2019 Year-End report](#):

- **IDPs/Refugees:** "As of December 2019, there were some 2.2 million IDPs. In north-west Nigeria, inter-communal clashes resulted in the displacement of over 210,300 people across Katsina, Sokoto and Zamfara States, and forced more than 35,000 refugees to flee into Niger. In north-east Nigeria, due to deteriorating security conditions new waves of displacement increased the overall number of IDPs to 2 million. In the Middle Belt, some

277,400 people were internally displaced in Benue, Nasarawa and Plateau States, 57% of whom were estimated to be below 18 years old. Nigeria hosted over 51,700 Cameroonian refugees (of which over 14,800 arrived in 2019, an increase of 35% compared to 2018). At the end of 2019, there were more than 2,400 urban refugees and 1,000 asylum-seekers in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo, Kano and Abuja."

According to the [UN Global Human Development Indicators](#) (2019) and [Human Development Report for Nigeria](#) (2019):

- **HDI score and ranking (2019):** Nigeria ranked 158th out of 189 countries with a score of 0.534. Nigeria is thus in the low human development category.
- **Gender inequality (2019):** The Gender Development Index (GDI) score was 0.868 (female - 0.492, male - 0.567). There was no data for the Gender Inequality Index (GII).
- **Total unemployment rate (female to male ratio):** 1.12

Whilst education rates are low across the board, girls in particular are discouraged from attending school, both due to economic and socio-cultural factors. According to a 2017 [UNICEF](#) report, girls are 6% less likely to attend 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; 44% of girls are married before their eighteenth birthday, and 18% before their 15th birthday. 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. This results in girls growing up uneducated, ignorant of their rights and economically dependent on men.

Demographic developments might shift the precarious balance in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians. The Muslim population is [growing faster](#) than the Christian population (Opera News, accessed 4 January 2021). The fact that the Muslim population could already use its numerical strength in the judiciary and legislature to amend the Constitution to extend the remit of Sharia law - as recently expressed by the Chief Justice of Nigeria - suggests that for some, democracy is more a 'game of numbers' than a means of protection for minorities. The combination of high numbers of children and youth, a lack of education and employment opportunities and high levels of poverty is potentially dangerous for the future of Nigeria. It 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 a Sharia nation.

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. 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.

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, and leave everything behind.

Technological landscape

According to [World Internet Stats](#) (accessed June 2020):

- **Internet usage:** 61.2% penetration - survey date: December 2019
- **Facebook usage:** 13.2% penetration – survey date: December 2019

According to [World Bank's Country Profile](#) (2018 data):

- **Mobile phone subscriptions:** 88.2 per 100 people

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net Report 2019](#):

- Nigeria is categorized as 'partly free' with a score of 64 points out of 100.
- "Infrastructural challenges, including unreliable access to electricity, hampers both access to the internet and internet speeds. Despite these drawbacks, Nigeria has one of the largest populations of internet users in sub-Saharan Africa ... Most of the growth in internet use can be attributed to the proliferation of mobile phone services."
- "The persistent arrests of users for their online activities under the 2015 Cybercrime Act has resulted in growing self-censorship, particularly among professional journalists who publish content online."
- "The implementation of Sharia (Islamic law) in 12 northern states has not affected internet freedom in those regions to date. Nonetheless, libel is a criminal offense in Nigeria, including online, with the burden of proof resting on the defendant. Print media journalists covering sensitive issues such as official corruption and communal violence are regularly subject to criminal prosecution."
- "Nigeria's internet landscape is characterized by a significant digital gender divide. Research published in 2015 by the World Wide Web Foundation and the Paradigm Initiative found that poor women in Lagos were 50 percent less likely to have access to the internet than men of the same age, education, and income level."

Social media has made it possible for Christians in Nigeria to be heard. Had there been no social media, the attacks on Christian communities would have largely gone unreported and the killing of Christians would be ignored. There is however the other side of the coin: Social media is also a platform for hate-speech against Christians, for instance as carried out by leaders of aggressive Islamic groups in Nigeria and in posts of sermons preached by Islamic clerics. Besides social media, there seems to be an increase in hatred even among teenagers in schools, at markets and in other public places. Christians are often portrayed as infidels and second-class citizens. The Internet and social media have increased this type of attack.

However, there is yet another side to consider, which shows how complex the situation in Nigeria has become: The Roman Catholic Bishop of Sokoto [warned](#) in July 2019: "The continued hate-speech against the Fulani herdsmen as being currently done on social media, constitutes a threat to the unity and peace of Nigeria". He said this in a speech held at a seminar on "Fake

news and hate speech", organized by the Olusegun Obasanjo Centre for African Studies, a unit of the National Open University of Nigeria.

Security situation

Christians in Nigeria have faced some of the deadliest attacks ever perpetrated by Islamic militants. The [Global Terrorism Index 2020](#) ranked Nigeria 3rd on the list of countries most affected by terrorism. This has been the case since 2015. The responses by the government are clearly not enough, since perpetrators of such violence are able to continue attacking Christians, and other Nigerians, with impunity. There are indications that during the months of COVID-19 lockdown, the people were confined to their villages while the attackers could move around more or less freely. See section Violence below for monthly data on Christians killed and abducted for the WWL 2021 reporting period.

There are various factors and many violent groups in Nigeria to consider. (As the Section 'Trends Analysis' below shows, Christian vigilantes can also be a problem.) The main groups and factors are:

Boko Haram and its split-off ISWAP

In line with the violent traditions of the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s and the Sharia implementation of 1999, Christians in northern Nigeria have increasingly become targets for jihadist attacks. Building on this, Boko Haram has, for the past few years, carried out a systematic campaign against the Nigerian state, specifically targeting Christians in its ideology, rhetoric and actions with the intent of establishing an Islamic state. Using the rhetoric of radical Islam, it declared an Islamic caliphate in Gwoza, Borno State, in August 2014. The expansion of this caliphate was stopped by government forces, but the violence caused by Boko Haram continues to affect thousands of people (especially Christians) and fosters a mutual distrust between Christians and Muslims in the entire region.

What is making the issue transnational is the fact that Boko Haram is also operating in neighboring countries. This group can recruit members in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and other states. That means that even if the situation in Nigeria gets more difficult for them, they can easily regroup in those other countries. Although the Nigerian army's campaigns have been partially effective, the situation for Christians is also contingent upon whether or not the government of Nigeria and other countries in the region will come up with more effective joint-measures to combat the militant threat.

In August 2016 it became apparent that there was a split off from Boko Haram, called Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP). Their activities are very similar but they differ in terms of their religious-ideological expression. Boko Haram mainly operates in southern Borno and northern Adamawa State which borders Cameroon. ISWAP mainly operates in northern Borno close to the border with Chad. Both have pledged allegiance to IS.

Fulani militants

Violence is also being perpetrated by Islamic assailants commonly identified as Fulani militants, who descend on predominantly Christian villages in the Middle Belt region, including southern

Kaduna, attacking innocent people, including women and children. They leave a trail of killing, rape and destruction. This violence against Christian-majority ethnic communities across Nigeria's central region is expanding into communities that had been thought to be safe, such as Plateau State and even further south. There are reports about violence and land grabbing by Fulani militants in the Southwest, even the Southeast of Nigeria. For a better understanding of the background to the violence in the northern states, see the series of [detailed Focus Nigeria reports](#) prepared by World Watch Research and partners (password freedom).

Nigeria's Fulani herdsmen presently operate under 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'; all federally registered organizations in Nigeria. Whether these umbrellas (or one or two of them) can also be considered to be the operational center(s) of the armed Fulani herdsmen or Fulani militants, needs further research.

Armed bandits

Apart from Boko Haram and ISWAP, a third category of violent aggressors has become increasingly active. The UN High Commission for Refugees reports that violence spreading from the Northeast to Northwest and the Middle Belt is due to a range of armed and criminal groups that continue to rampage through communities – killing, raping, plundering, burning and kidnapping for ransom (including the abduction of girls as young as 10 years of age). Victims say that they are frequently told "Convert or be killed!". This would seem to confirm the impression held by some that at least part of those gangs are Fulani too. However, as stated by a country analyst, not all Fulanis are kidnapers and not all kidnapers in Nigeria are Fulanis. The kidnapping business had been going on in the southern part of Nigeria before the Fulanis joined them in the kidnapping business and extended it to the North, where also Boko Haram increasingly engages in this macabre 'business model'.

It is important to note that the term '(armed) bandits' is being increasingly widely used by national and international media when reporting attacks on Christians (and on Muslims who do not actively buy into the Islamist agenda). The widespread use of this term is causing the religious-ideological agenda behind many of the attacks to be ignored ('persecution eclipse').

There is evidence that alliances are being created between these different groups. On 12 July 2020, HumAngle reported that Abubakar Shekau, leader of Boko Haram, is working on a "[bewildering expansionist agenda](#)", trying to connect violent Islamic militant groups in the north-eastern, north-western and north-central areas of Nigeria. Shekau's influence also stretches into surrounding Cameroon, Chad and Niger, where fighters have pledged allegiance to him. It is likely that Shekau's vision goes well beyond the three strategic geo-political enclaves highlighted in the article. If effective government intervention does not curb their advance, the South-West, South-East and South-South are within reach. This is especially evident where Boko Haram fighters mix with Fulani militants and 'Shuwa Arabs' (or 'Cowmen from Chad, Sudan etc.), thus forming a multi-faceted force that is difficult to grasp (for state governors attempting to control the levels of violence) and is allegedly linked to powerful individuals and politicians.

The government security apparatus

There is a strong suspicion about the role of the security apparatus in the country. In many cases the government forces fail in protecting the population against attacks from Fulani militants or armed bandits. They either do not act or arrive too late at the scene of violence. Sometimes they are even suspected of having a more active role in the violence. A governor in north-east Nigeria has suggested that efforts to defeat Boko Haram are being undermined by elements of the [security apparatus](#) (BBC News, 2 August 2020). The Borno State governor also questioned why the Nigerian army was stopping thousands of displaced people from returning home to their fields whilst soldiers were instead cultivating the land. The prosecutor of the International Criminal Court has 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 (BBC News, 11 December 2020).

However, not all security apparatus is suspect. Data from the joint research project with two Nigerian partner organizations shows that part of the security apparatus has fought the insurgents and incurred serious losses. See Section 'Violence' below.

Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS)

The fragile security situation in Nigeria is also illustrated by events concerning the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS). In October 2020, just after the end of the WWL 2021 reporting period, protests erupted against the brutal activities of SARS. President Buhari disbanded SARS but unveiled the Special Weapons and Tactics Team (SWAT). When protests continued, soldiers killed at least 48 demonstrators in Lagos. Nigeria's government has begun [punishing](#) the young organizers of the #EndSARS movement by freezing their bank accounts and revoking their passports (The Conversation, 8 December 2020).

ICC inquiry into Nigeria

Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda of the International Criminal Court has called for a [formal inquiry](#) to begin into war crimes and crimes against humanity in Nigeria. The conflict has killed over 30,000 and displaced more than two million people. The ICC's preliminary examination, which began in 2010, has now concluded that the "criteria for opening an investigation into the situation in Nigeria have been met" (BBC News, 11 December 2020).

Nigeria, Country of particular Concern

Michael R. Pompeo, 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" (US Secretary of State, Press Statement, 7 December 2020).

Corruption and impunity

Corruption is a major concern in Nigeria. The violent attacks on Christians and Christian communities are partly 'fall-out' from this 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 con-

flict 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 and Fulani militants. The lucrative economic benefits from unaccounted security expenditure induces those who benefit from them to keep quiet and look the other way rather than challenge corrupt practices that comprise the security of citizens. Hence, conflict has become a money-making enterprise.

The biggest criminal behind organized crime responsible for corruption is the government, fostered by the ruling party. Massive amounts of oil revenues are disappearing and unaccounted for. This happens whichever government is in power, it seems. Under Jonathan Goodluck corruption was also rife. Under the current regime, the war against corruption is skewed towards fighting opposition leaders and using Christians and southerners as scapegoats. Members of the ruling party and Muslim public office holders are generally left untouched. This climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption is ultimately furthering the Islamization of Nigeria.

The gender component

The security situation has gender components. Men and boys are specifically targeted for physical elimination by death, in order to guarantee that the birthrate of Christians falls and to claim land. The mission to depopulate Christian-dominated territories in the North has also caused a spike in the abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Christian girls and women, including married women. Islamic militants also rape and sexually abuse women, forcing them into sexual slavery, or killing them. More information can be found in Sections 'Gender-specific religious persecution Female and Male'.

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 ([OECD](#), 2019) 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 been struggling with deep-rooted issues. Due to its size and human and 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 and competition among politicians 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 government has not produced working solutions to the security crisis

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 spreading towards the South, and the government has not produced any working plan to solve the crisis.

As a result, both the Middle Belt and northern Nigeria have huge 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 this region. And this, in turn, encourages further violence with impunity and culminates in constant fear among the Christian population where attacks are common.

This vicious circle can only be broken if the international community intervenes with humanitarian (and other forms of) aid, and puts pressure on the Nigerian government to come up with a comprehensive policy to address this complex and deadly situation. As long as this is not the case, official visits and trade delegations to Nigeria should be postponed or clearly positioned within this framework.

3) 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. 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 might be [Turkey](#) (CBN News, 14 November 2019). The chaos created by such a situation, under the passively watching eye of an inactive government, reinforces the suspicion that a climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption is being created to further the Islamization agenda.

4) Nigeria could become a destabilizing power for the entire region and beyond

Nigeria has become a destabilizing power 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 will become an even more strongly destabilizing power for the [entire region](#),

if not the whole African continent, and maybe even beyond (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.

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Link for general background information: Nigeria country profile - BBC News - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550>
- Recent history: shift in attitude - <https://humangle.ng/nigerias-terror-king-shekau-connects-east-west-and-centre-in-a-puzzling-agenda/>
- Political and legal landscape: rejected the law - <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/1870/law-to-control-nigerian-churches-unacceptable-ungodly-reprehensible-christian-leaders>
- Political and legal landscape: 2019 OECD report - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NG.pdf>
- Political and legal landscape: 2017 report - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/NGA/INT_CEDAW_NGO_NGA_27702_E.pdf
- Political and legal landscape: 3.38% - <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/indicators/SG.GEN.PARL.ZS/rankings>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's October 2019 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria>
- Economic landscape: World Bank's blog published on 22 September 2020 - <https://blogs.worldbank.org/african/advancing-transparency-and-accountability-public-expenditure-pandemic-environment>
- Social and cultural landscape: UNDP 2019 report - <http://www.hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr2019.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Factbook - <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/the-world-factbook/attachments/summaries/NI-summary.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Bank's October 2019 update - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria>
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- Social and cultural landscape: UNHCR's Global Focus, 2019 Year-End report - <https://reporting.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/pdfsummaries/GR2019-Nigeria-eng.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: UN Global Human Development Indicators - <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA>
- Social and cultural landscape: Human Development Report for Nigeria - http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/NGA.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: UNICEF - <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/media/1446/file/%20Nigeria-impact-evaluation-UNICEF-Nigeria-girls-education-project-phase-3.pdf.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: growing faster - https://www.operanewsapp.com/ng/en/share/detail?news_id=c63c1a86f7bb10bf0b531c378f86a93e&news_entry_id=se2131fd191123en_ng&open_type=transcoded&from=&request_id=share_request
- Social and cultural landscape: 2017 CEDAW - https://tbinternet.ohchr.org/Treaties/CEDAW/Shared%20Documents/NGA/INT_CEDAW_NGO_NGA_27702_E.pdf
- Technological landscape: World Internet Stats - <https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ng>
- Technological landscape: World Bank's Country Profile - https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57&tbar=y&dd=y&inf=n&zm=n&country=NGA

- Technological landscape: Freedom on the Net Report 2019 - <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-net/2019>
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- Security situation: Global Terrorism Index 2020 - <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/GTI-2020-web-1.pdf>
- Security situation: detailed Focus Nigeria reports - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports>
- Security situation: bewildering expansionist agenda - <https://humangle.ng/nigerias-terror-king-shekau-connects-east-west-and-centre-in-a-puzzling-agenda/>
- Security situation: security apparatus - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-53632643>
- Security situation: formal inquiry - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55277712>
- Security situation: punishing - <https://theconversation.com/nigerians-got-their-abusive-sars-police-force-abolished-but-elation-soon-turned-to-frustration-150355>
- Security situation: formal inquiry - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55277712>
- Security situation: Nigeria as Country - <https://www.state.gov/united-states-takes-action-against-violators-of-religious-freedom-2/>
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- Security situation: public poll - <https://noi-polls.com/noipolls-rape-poll-report/>
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- Trends analysis: entire region - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Africa-Mapping-Islamic-militancy-July-2019-FINAL.pdf>

WWL 2021: 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 reintroduce 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, accessed 4 January 2021). 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 flourishing 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	25,536,000	26.8
Protestant	62,059,000	65.1
Independent	28,285,000	29.7
Unaffiliated	145,000	0.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	- 20,670,000	-21.7
Total	95,358,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	45,500,000	47.7
Renewalist movement	60,000,000	62.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed February 2020)

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 Section "Religious landscape" above). 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. However, the current combination of Islamic missionary activity mixed with violence from various Islamist groups is a significant threat to the life of the Church, also in the South.

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/>

WWL 2021: Persecution Dynamics / Nigeria

Reporting period

1 October 2019 - 30 September 2020

Position on the World Watch List

Nigeria: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2021	85	9
WWL 2020	80	12
WWL 2019	80	12
WWL 2018	77	14
WWL 2017	78	12

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2017-2021 reporting periods

Nigeria's score increased by 5 points compared to the WWL 2020, all due to the average pressure increasing by 1 point. The score for violence stayed at the maximum possible level of 16.7 points. Violence against Christians perpetrated by Boko Haram, ISWAP and Fulani militants, as well as by armed bandits, has continued to cause tremendous suffering among Christians in the northern parts of the country as well in the Middle Belt. The higher score for average pressure has been caused by the effects of increasing violence spilling over into the southern part of the country, which has contributed to an increase in pressure in different *spheres of life* of Christians in the South. The security apparatus, which is largely under federal control, and which has been

strongly Islamized during Buhari's presidency, is often not acting to protect Christians. The situation is approaching a tipping-point during this second term of President Buhari.

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	Very weak
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**

“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: Dr. Funom Makama, 2020. A compilation of Online Publications and Press Releases as Proofs of the Killings of Christians in Nigeria, p.5., emphasis added)

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 how things are going. The above quote from the now President Buhari suggests it is not so much about policies but more about “agitation”, in other words,

about creating or allowing chaos and impunity to prevail.

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

In Nigeria the Islamization process is strongly 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 just watching. 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 in this direction, since many are feeling excluded.

In northern Nigeria (including the Middle Belt), 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 Fulani militants and so-called armed bandits. As explained above (in the section "Security situation"), the circles of influence of these different groups are now increasingly overlapping, including their agendas, and this is threatening not only for the northern states (including the Middle Belt states) but also the southern states. Clear examples of land grabbing and related violence by Fulani militants, can already be seen in the South-west and South-east.

While the process of Islamization was, until recently, mainly taking place at individual state level, under the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari it is being increasingly felt to be facilitated at national level (at the level of the Federal government). This is particularly evident in the government's policy of key nominations (see "Political and legal landscape" above) and in the way an atmosphere of impunity is allowed which mainly benefits the activities of the different violent Islamic groups, as well as other criminal groups. For further details, see the "Security situation" section above which also indicates how systemic corruption contributes to the increasing Islamization of Nigeria.

As suggested in the section entitled "Trends analysis" above, if the current developments in Nigeria are extrapolated into the future, there will be so much "agitation" 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 other minorities that are not following the same Islamist agenda.

Drivers of persecution

Nigeria:									
Drivers of persecution per engine	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG	WEAK	VERY 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	-		-	-	Very weak			-	-
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	-			Weak	-
One's own (extended) family	Very strong		Weak	Weak	Very weak			Weak	-
Political parties	Strong		-	-	-			Very strong	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Medium		Medium	-	-			Medium	Medium
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very strong		-	-	-			Strong	Very strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC, embassies etc.)	Medium		-	-	-			Medium	-

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 and Organized corruption and crime

- Government officials (Very strong to Strong):** Islamization in Nigeria has increased under the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari. It seems that President Buhari uses his position in power to appoint Muslims to key positions in the country, and to allow (if not encourage) a culture of impunity that makes it possible for violations against Christians to go largely unnoticed ('persecution eclipse'). The governments (and non-state actors) of the 12 Sharia states were already on the same track, but with the president now as their example, they may feel encouraged to further Islamize their states 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 (further) Islamize their states, even in the South. Some state governments are trying to remain strong and protect their whole citizenry.

- ***Ethnic group leaders (Very strong to Strong):*** Ethnic group leaders as drivers of persecution, discrimination and intolerance have two dimensions: One is 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 is whether (and how) they commit acts of persecution, discrimination and intolerance 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 Islamization of their ethnic groups and beyond.
- ***Non-Christian religious leaders (very Strong to Medium):*** Many non-Christian religious, particularly 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, Fulani militants and armed bandits. (See “Security situation” above.)
- ***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 are not involved in violent attacks. However, the activities of MACBAN have become highly politicized in recent times because of links to powerful patrons, including the President of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto. MACBAN gives protection to Fulani militants and justification for their aggression. The President of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto have continued to lend 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 Fulani Muslims are taking, including justifying their violence against farmers. Fulani settlers are diverse. They are not all linked to Fulani herdsmen beyond sharing ethnic and religious identity. The herdsmen are more likely to be animists or syncretistic in their practice of Islam or ATR. Fulani settlers tend to be Muslims, although there are Fulani Christians as well. Many Fulani settlers who are

Muslim normally 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 southerner 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 Middle Belt) where Islam has become an all-embracing attribute of identity, or where the Islamic religious identity has become politicized (not only because of what is happening in those states themselves but also increasingly fueled by developments at national level under President Buhari.)

Political parties (Strong to Very 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. This is reflected in its approach towards governance and policies that are inherently pro-Islam and anti-Christian.

- **Organized crime cartels or networks (Very strong to strong):** Drivers of the Persecution engine *Organized corruption and crime* can be government officials at different levels, together with other leading people from different sectors of society. This is explained in more detail in the section "Security situation" above.

Another category are criminal groups (in the context of Nigeria often partly overlapping with religious-ideological groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and some armed bandit groups). They are not always directly responsible for committing violations against Christians; there are times when their responsibility is indirect – i.e. by contributing to a potential escalation of "agitation" into chaos that leads to 'persecution eclipse', thus adding to the push for the further Islamization of Nigeria.

Map of country



Areas where Christians face most difficulties

Nigeria has six geo-political zones: North-central (loosely known as the Middle Belt); North-east; North-west; South-east; South-west; South-south (also known as the Niger Delta region). The map of Nigeria presented above is not based on these zones but on the three-way division of the country in Sharia states, Middle Belt states and southern states.

Each zone has its own profile of hostilities against Christians (and others). Violence in the North-east was/is mainly perpetrated by Boko Haram and ISWAP. In the North-west there were/are the armed bandits. In the Middle Belt including Kaduna State, there were/are the Fulani militants. The circles of influence of these different groups are now increasingly overlapping, including their agendas. Much of this has to do with Boko Haram's leadership which is trying to create alliances with different groups in the North, also reaching into the South. (See "Recent history" above.)

Persecution, discrimination and intolerance are strongest in the 12 northern Sharia states (marked green in the map above) and the Middle Belt states (marked beige). (These 19 states correspond with the North-west, North-east and North-central of Nigeria, with Abuja FCT included.)

The situation of basic rights violations in the 12 Sharia states can be characterized by 'submission into dhimmitude' (classical Islamic concept of second-class citizenship) and violence. Although there are differences among 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% (11,750,000 Christians out of a population of 78,364,000). Apart from direct violence, Christians face all sorts of pressure in their different spheres of life. The various forms of pressure are indicated in section "Pressure in the 5 spheres of life" below.

The situation of basic rights violations in the 7 Middle Belt states (Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Taraba) is somewhat comparable with the 12 Sharia states. Their Christian population totals 50% (15,150,000 Christians out of a population of 30,067,000). The Christians in these states are also confronted with a mix of violence, and 'dhimmitude' in the Muslim-majority areas within these states. However, the emphasis is on violence, committed mainly by Fulani militants and armed bandits, although Boko Haram increasingly has its part in it too. It is also important to realize that both Boko Haram and the Fulani militants are frequently joined by fighters from neighboring countries.

A very specific form of violence against Christians are the raids on (often) small Christian communities (or villages) in the rural areas of various states. When a (mainly) Christian community is attacked, some of the residents are killed, others are (seriously) wounded; others are abducted. Often men and boys are killed; women and girls are abducted. Many flee from their houses and fields. There is always fear. When the night falls, there is always the fear of an attack, and of what might happen to oneself and one's family. A husband or son killed leaves the mother and the 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 them – such thoughts torment the mind incessantly. (See the section "Violence" below for more information.)

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 being 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 allows the situation that has created the crisis to continue unabatedly.

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 has been relatively peaceful. That is now changing. 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 Nigeria) that "not less than 350 Igbo communities, villages and other locations are now invaded and permanently occupied by the Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen and 'imported' Shuwa Arabs, also called 'Cowmen' in Arabic." The number was 139 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).

In a way, the whole country is increasingly becoming a hotspot for violations, as explained in different sections of this dossier. Islamization under President Buhari is getting such a boost, that one wonders how long it will be before the conditions prevalent in the northern Sharia states and states of the Middle Belt will reproduce themselves in the southern states of Nigeria.

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.

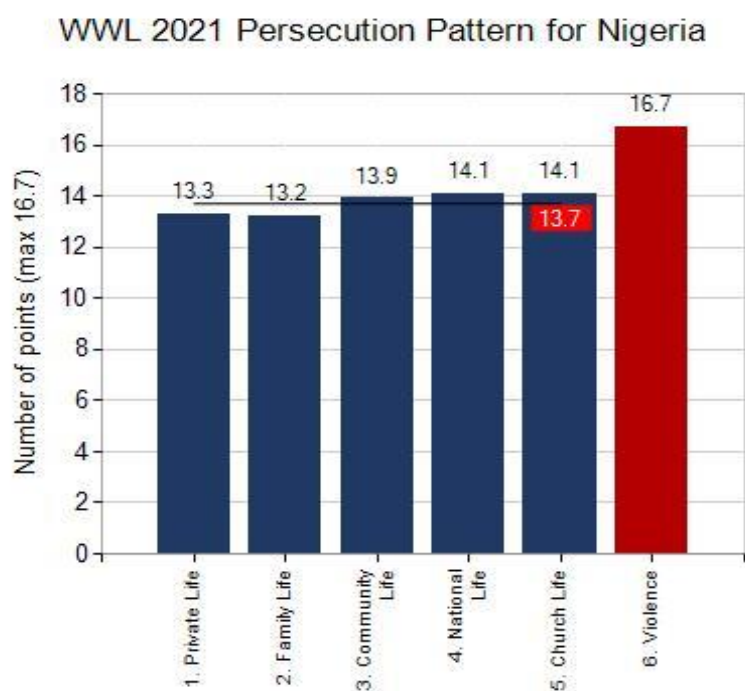
Historical Christian communities: In Nigeria these include the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations such as Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans. These churches face violent attacks against their life and property perpetrated by militant groups and discrimination from the local authorities, especially in the northern states (and also the Middle Belt).

Converts to Christianity: These are mostly converts from Islam to Christianity. They are often forced to find refuge in 'safe houses' due to the danger of severe persecution and potential killing. Muslim converts to Christianity from northern Nigeria (including the Muslim-majority areas in the Middle Belt) often have to flee their homes and states to escape being killed or harassed. 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 northern states (including the Middle Belt) the Evangelical and Pentecostal communities face discrimination by the local authorities, as well as violent attacks against their life and property by militant groups. Their fate and that of the Historical Christian communities are comparable. Some of them are very active in evangelism, and go where it is really dangerous to go, which can increase the chance of being attacked.

Although no exact data on Church growth are available, the impression is that the growth of the Nigerian Church was seriously hampered in the WWL 2021 reporting period by the combined effects of violence and the COVID-19 lockdown measures. While violent militant groups took the opportunity to increase their levels of violence against Christians (and others) during the months of lockdown (see the "Violence" section below), the lockdown itself made traditional forms of evangelism virtually impossible.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2021 persecution pattern for Nigeria shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nigeria is very high at a level of 13.7 points, one full point more than in WWL 2020.
- All *spheres of life* scored above 13 points out of the maximum of 16.7, with *Community*, *National* and *Church spheres of life* all recording extreme levels of pressure. The difference between the lowest score (*Family sphere*) and highest scores (*National sphere and Church sphere*) is only 0.9 point. In WWL 2020 it was 1.6 points.
- The score for violence is the maximum possible (16.7 points), the same as in WWL 2020.

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 2021 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: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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 northern Nigeria (including parts of the Middle Belt) 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 happens to a limited degree in south-western areas. 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 northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt), 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 could even happen in some parts in the South, though (much) less likely.

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.25 points)

In the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) it is a serious risk for Christians from an Islamic background to share their faith with their Muslim family, because it reveals their new religious status. This is less likely to occur in the South, although it happens there too, to a limited degree. In addition, public exposure can be a risk for other Christians during attacks and sometimes in IDP situations.

Block 1.7: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members. (3.00 points)

This is comparable to the foregoing question. The score is however a bit lower. For converts, it might even be more precarious if the immediate family is Muslim. However, for other Christians it is most often easier.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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 "Areas where Christians face most difficulties" above.) 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 "Gender-specific religious persecution" below.)

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. (3.50 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 or children are also separated from their parents by abduction. [Leah Sharibu](#) is an example, representing many others (Christianity Today, 20 December 2020). 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 2.7: 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 turn them into 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.

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.00 points)

In almost all Sharia states, Christian Religious Knowledge has been banned from public schools, and children of Christians are forced to attend Islamic Education classes. Children of Christians are sometimes even forced to participate in Muslim prayers during school hours. In most Northern universities, those who study law are forced to study Sharia law as a compulsory subject. Christian students are compelled to learn how to recite Muslims prayers. For children of converts from Islam to Christianity the situation is even harder, because they do not want to draw unnecessary attention to their parents' conversion.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

Block 3.3: Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage. (3.50 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 the "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 marriages are sometimes carried out with the active connivance of ruling emirs.

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 North (including the Middle Belt). However, the Nigerian relief agency is biased when it comes to the distribution of relief items and Christians are often left out and the agency is also known not to respond swiftly when emergencies involve Christians. Even when they do respond, the items they bring are most often [grossly inadequate](#) (WWL, Nigeria: Assessment of Christian situation in 4 north-eastern states, 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.

Block 3.1: Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.). (3.25 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. In Muslim dominated areas and communities, Christians often face harassment because of their clothing, speech and forms of worship. Some see Christians as infidels and second-class citizens. A female Christian cannot dress in certain ways when going to an office, school, hospital etc. if the state or com-

munity is dominated by (radicalizing) Muslims. Stones might be thrown by children at women and girls; they might even be arrested by the *hisbah* religious police. Even men can be detained for having an "immoral" hair cut.

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 country analyst affirmed that this is one of the reasons why attacks on Christians and their property keep increasing. When attackers are arrested, they are often quickly released; this is common where violence has been carried out by Fulani militants or armed bandits in the context of Islamic militancy.

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 the Constitution and its operation negatively impacts Christians. This question is scored for the Sharia states only, although the mere existence of the issue has meaning for the way the whole nation is governed.

Block 4.15: Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment. (3.50 points)

Most of this happens in the North, where the local courts are often channels for oppressing Christians. There is gross inequality in the administration of justice, since the majority of judges are Muslims in a radicalizing Islamic environment. Should there be an issue between a Christian and a Muslim, the Muslim knows he will most often be favored. Christians have served prison sentences for crimes which a Muslim is easily discharged for or is not even charged for in the first place. At times Christians are even charged in Sharia courts which have no jurisdiction over them. Their evidence is worth half of that of a Muslim.

Block 4.10: Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians. (3.25 points)

This is a major problem in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) but stretches out over the whole country. Attacks on Christian communities are often reported as being 'communal clashes'. In the case of reprisal attacks, Christians are often portrayed as the initiators. Media reporting by government and Muslim-owned media deliberately distort and under-report persecution and attacks against Christians by Muslims. Sometimes reports are doctored by the government first and then presented in the media. International media are often misreporting the persecution of Christians too. The Nigerian government is investing massively in campaigns to influence international media.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

Block 5.1: Church activities have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed. (3.50 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. (See "Areas where Christians face most difficulties" above.) 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. The activities of churches are also monitored, obstructed or hindered from time to time. Church activities are often not carried out 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 protection. In several of the northern states, Christians are denied access to land for building churches. This was recently even reported for parts of eastern Nigeria.

Block 5.7: Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts. (3.50 points)

Most of this happens in the North. Openly integrating Muslim converts could provoke violence against the church and church-owned buildings. Many of the converts from Islam to Christianity have to be taken to safe locations elsewhere in Nigeria due to the risk of being attacked.

Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.50 points)

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. Pastors, and their family members are increasingly being targeted for attacks (e.g. for abduction or killing). In 2019, the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) released statistics of church leaders who were either abducted, killed or attacked (especially those speaking out about the persecution situation). This trend has continued into the reporting period for the WWL 2021 (and beyond).

Block 5.20: It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution. (3.50 points)

In an atmosphere of "agitation", chaos, impunity and increasing 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.

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. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (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 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again,

the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure.

Nigeria: Violence Block question	WWL 2021	WWL 2020
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	3530	1350
6.2 How many churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	270	150
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	25	225
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?	25	20
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	990	224
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	1000	450
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	100	130
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10000	1000
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?	1000	1500
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?	1000	1000
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	1000	No data
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1000	No data

The calculation of the number of Christians killed is the result of an in-depth data gathering project by WWR in collaboration with the [Kukah Centre](#) and the [Para-Mallam Peace Foundation](#). The project has not only looked at Christians killed but also at Muslims killed (and others). It also records the number of Christians killed per month (i.e. for the period October 2019 - September 2020). It is to be noted that the majority of attacks on Christians and Christian communities were carried out during the COVID-19 lockdown period. More details can be found in the article on Violence found in the "WWL 2021 Compilation of main documents" published on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

The number of Christians killed has risen from 1350 (in WWL 2020) to 3530 in the WWL 2021 reporting period. This rise is not only due to better data gathering; it also reflects the reality on the ground. As stated above, it seems that the COVID-19 lockdown has kept ordinary citizens in their homes but assailants on the roads and in the bushes. This has been an extremely stressful experience for Nigerians in general and Christians in particular.

Behind the bare numbers for the different categories of violence, much lies hidden from view. A husband or son killed leaves the mother and the 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 them – such thoughts torment the mind incessantly.

When a (mainly) Christian community is attacked, some are killed, some are (seriously) wounded and others are abducted. Often men and boys are killed; 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. 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.

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.

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 likely that the assailants want to kill as many members of the villages as possible. If so, they would do it 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 are abducted for sexual slavery or forced marriage. Then it is mainly about women and girls. Others are abducted for ransom - often men. Church leaders are popular, probably because they are expected to be able to raise large sums of money quickly from their congregations or 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 in such circumstances: Children are vulnerable to health problems and women and girls to abuse and human trafficking.

In the table above, the numbers cited for questions 6.7, 6.9, 6.10, 6.11 and 6.12 are symbolic numbers. More details can be found in the article on Violence found in the "WWL 2021 Compilation of main documents" published on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

For the questions listed above, a comparison of the data for WWL 2021 with the data for WWL 2020 does not make sense, especially where concrete numbers had been used for WWL 2020 data. For WWL 2020, only the statistics for 6.8 and 6.10 were symbolic numbers.

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.

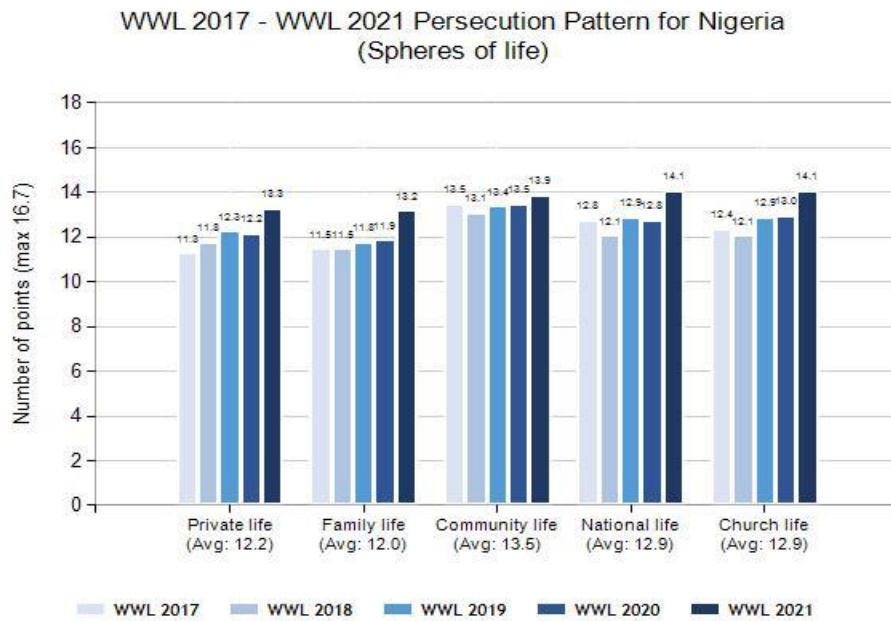
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Nigeria: WWL 2017 - WWL 2021 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2021	13.7
2020	12.7
2019	12.7
2018	12.1
2017	12.3

The average pressure in Nigeria has been increasing over the last few years. 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.

The WWL 2015 reporting period covered the year before the elections that dethroned the then sitting President Goodluck Jonathan. President Muhammadu Buhari came to power in 2015 and was re-elected in 2019. Before he came to power, Nigeria had already been heading towards chaos for quite some time. Yet the “agitation” President Buhari has allowed (if not openly aimed for) has caused further deterioration in the country's situation for all Nigerians and especially for Christians. At the current time, in his second term, the situation seems to be getting very precarious.

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 lowest and highest values is 2.0 points for *Private life*, *National life* and *Church life*, and 1.7 points for *Family life*. For *Community life* it is 0.8 but that is mainly related to the fact that the lowest value for *Community life* was already very high (13.1 points). This pattern reflects the gradual process of Islamization taking place under Buhari's presidency. In situations of high levels of Islamic militant violence, 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 or near-maximum levels over the past few years. In addition to the scores in the reporting periods listed above, the score for violence in WWL 2014 was 15.6 points; in WWL 2015: 16.7 points; in WWL 2016: 16.7 points.

Over the last 8 years, the score for violence in Nigeria has 5 times been the maximum score (16.7 points). 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 (as the number of Christians even in the north of Nigeria is quite large), but also to the dynamics of unceasing Islamic militant violence in the country.

Gender-specific religious persecution Female

Female Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied custody of children
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Enforced religious dress code
Forced marriage
Forced to flee town/country
Targeted Seduction
Trafficking
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological
Violence – sexual
Violence – Verbal

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly also in the South, the gender component of the attacks and suffering of Christian women and girls continues to be dire. Raids by Boko Haram and its split off 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 it easier for them to be maltreated.

Abduction is a Pressure Point used regularly and as a tactic to depopulate Christian-dominated territory, particularly in the North. Most commonly it is Christian girls who are abducted for the purpose of forced marriage and forced conversion – even women who are already married. The label of ‘marriage’ in such situations is used to mask and defend the actual slavery that is happening. According to a country expert, cases such as these are “spreading like wildfire”. When parents try to rescue their child, they commonly face resistance from the community, police and judges, who argue that the marriage is legitimate under Islamic law and the girls have accepted Islam. In addition to being ‘married’ off, girls abducted by militants have reportedly been used as suicide bombers or as fighters.

The fear that something will happen with their Christian daughters causes many Christian parents to have them married early as a kind of 'protection'. This, alongside laws permitting under-age marriage in some states, results in a particularly high early marriage rate for Christian girls. Some Christian parents also choose to keep their girls at home, due to the dangers facing girls travelling to school; this compounds the dependency of women and girls on men and fosters illiteracy in regards to their rights. Furthermore, the abduction of Christian girls, such as the Chibok girls in Borno state, has led to parents sending their daughters to schools in safer states. Those remaining in schools in northern states are forced to wear the Islamic code uniform.

When women are raped, their husbands can sometimes find it difficult to move past the trauma – they may even view their wife as tarnished, particularly if they have become 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. As a country expert explains: “Their self-worth is damaged, very few actually come out of that trauma. Communities don’t usually help this issue as many stigmatize rape victims.” Christian communities therefore end up deeply fractured. The high rate of killings of Christian men also causes many dependent wives and children to fall into poverty, or flee for safety.

The general perception of the Hausa ethnic group is that women are not supposed to work outside the home or fend for themselves. Increasing poverty can make them vulnerable to pressure from perpetrators of violations and they can fall into all sorts of problems in an effort to survive. In addition to the great emotional toll and social cost of such violations, in some communities where widows are the main breadwinners of the family, violations against women also affects the economic well-being of the community.

Gender-specific religious persecution Male

Male Pressure Points
Abduction
Denied inheritance or possessions
Discrimination/harassment via education
Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Imprisonment by government
Military/militia conscription/service against conscience
Violence – death
Violence – physical
Violence – psychological

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly also in the South, with Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed bandits, Christian men and boys are often specifically targeted and killed. Much of this violence happens by attacks on Christian communities in rural areas and at road blocks. These killings not only serve to eliminate the current generation of men and boys, but also guarantees that the birthrate of Christian families will fall considerably.

Among those who survive such attacks, many face abduction and forced inclusion in militant ranks. Young boys risk being recruited as child soldiers, and there are reports of church leaders and church members being regularly abducted for ransom. Discrimination against Christians has also been reported within the government armed forces, with Christian soldiers being posted to the most dangerous areas where many are killed by Boko Haram or other Islamic militant assailants.

Christian men and boys have also been strategically marginalized in terms of employment and education. They are unlikely to gain employment within the Federal Civil Service, even if highly qualified, and are increasingly excluded from gaining admission to schools or universities. The ensuing frustration causes many young men to leave the country in search of better opportunities.

The combination of these pressures 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 the way that the 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 and killed 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

In the WWL 2021 reporting period there were several reports about adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) facing hostility. For instance, in Kebbi State, the African Traditional worshippers known as Anuhula were severely attacked by the Kebbi State Government, using Fulani militants. Many of them were prevented from coming to the markets and had their houses destroyed.

Muslims who are not part of a militant group attacking communities, are also vulnerable to attack. Especially in the north-western states, many Muslims have been killed by the same groups that killed Christians, and also had to flee their villages. Data for people killed in Nigeria shows that while 3,530 Christians were reportedly killed by Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani Militants and armed bandits, there were also 1,020 Muslims killed - most of them by the same groups. Some were also killed by Christian vigilantes: Many Fulani, especially those that have settled and lived with Christians neighbors for many years, simply want to live their daily lives. Some of them are increasingly facing violence in the form of retaliation attacks carried out by Christian youths.

According to [US State Department's IRF 2019 executive summary](#), Shia Muslims, under the auspices of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), conducted a series of demonstrations in 2019 resulting in violent confrontations in July 2019 between protesters and security forces, which left as many as 30 dead, including protesters and police. Security forces fired on Shia religious processions for Ashura in September 2019, killing 12, according to the IMN. Following the July violence, the government banned the IMN and declared the group a terrorist organization.

Future outlook

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

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

The overall threat for the Church in Nigeria - and for most of its population - is the increasing Islamization in the country. This is not new but has grown during the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari, who claimed in 2001 during a seminar in Kaduna that he "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'." (See above in the section "Persecution engines".)

This country dossier shows that the level of "agitation" has become very high. Others 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 the grip of an inhumane dynamic, that victimizes many civilians and Christians in particular.

Also, climate change will continue to impact Nigeria through the desert encroachment. 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 situation continues its cascading spiral effect, an all-out chaos may be inevitable. Out of this chaos a new Nigeria might emerge, but one built on the foundation of violent jihadism. That would not only be disastrous for the Church in Nigeria and for the country itself, but also for the entire African continent and possibly beyond.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- 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/>
- Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere: Leah Sharibu - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/december/nigeria-katsina-boys-freed-boko-haram-chibok-leah-sharibu.html>
- Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere: grossly inadequate - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Nigeria-Assessment-of-Christian-situation-in-4-north-eastern-states-June-2017.pdf>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Kukah Centre - <https://thekukahcentre.org/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: Para-Mallam Peace Foundation - <https://para-mallampeacefoundation.org/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: World Watch List Documentation - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: US State Department's IRF 2019 executive summary - <https://www.state.gov/reports/2019-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nigeria/>
- Future outlook: Nigeria's Silent Slaughter - <https://iconhelp.org/silent-slaughter/>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on World Watch Research's Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) and on the World Watch Monitor website:

- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Nigeria>
- <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/Nigeria>

The following reports and articles are all available on the pages of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

1. WWR Analysis – General reports

- [Africa – Mapping Islamic militancy – July 2019](#)

2. Gender-specific religious persecution

- [Nigeria – Compound structural vulnerabilities facing Christian women \(revised version\) – 2019](#)
- [Nigeria – Boko Haram and Gender-based violence against Christian women and children in north-eastern Nigeria since 1999 – reissued 2015](#)

3. WWR Analysis – Focus Nigeria: 2013 – 2018

- [Nigeria – Assessment of Christian situation in 4 north-eastern states – 2018](#)
- [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 – Appraising the Buhari administration – 2016](#)
- [Nigeria – Violent Conflict in Taraba State \(2013 – 2015\) – 2015](#)
- [Nigeria – Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region – 2015](#)
- [Nigeria – Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies – 2015](#)
- [Nigeria – Persecution or civil unrest? – 2013](#)

4. Articles / Africa 2016 – 2018

- [NIGERIA – Fulani attacks reported by AI – 2018-02-07](#)
- [NIGERIA – A Fulani Christian convert in prison – 2017-08-22](#)
- [NIGERIA – Things to know about the deadly Fulani violence – 2017-08-21](#)
- [NIGERIA – Kebbi State persecution – 2016-11-30](#)

5. Other Open Doors reports

- [Nigeria Renew – Crushed-but-not-defeated-Revised-Summary-Report – 2016](#)
- [Nigeria Renew – Crushed-but-not-defeated-Full-Report – 2016](#)
- [Nigeria Renew – CAN Declaration – 2016](#)