

World
Watch
Research

Nigeria: Full Country Dossier

April 2023



OpenDoors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2023

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	94	94	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.6	8.7	92	91	92	92	91
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	5.9	89	88	87	85	86
4	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.7	12.2	89	88	88	87	86
5	Libya	15.6	15.5	15.9	16.1	16.3	9.1	88	91	92	90	87
6	Nigeria	13.8	13.8	14.6	14.8	14.4	16.7	88	87	85	80	80
7	Pakistan	13.4	13.8	14.8	14.8	12.9	16.7	86	87	88	88	87
8	Iran	14.5	14.6	13.8	15.8	16.5	10.7	86	85	86	85	85
9	Afghanistan	15.4	15.7	15.4	16.1	16.6	4.6	84	98	94	93	94
10	Sudan	14.1	14.2	14.9	14.9	15.5	9.4	83	79	79	85	87
11	India	12.3	13.1	13.0	14.8	13.3	15.7	82	82	83	83	83
12	Syria	13.2	14.1	13.6	14.1	14.1	11.3	80	78	81	82	82
13	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.9	15.8	16.7	2.4	80	81	78	79	77
14	Myanmar	12.5	11.6	13.9	13.9	12.9	15.4	80	79	74	73	71
15	Maldives	15.4	15.3	13.8	16.0	16.4	0.2	77	77	77	78	78
16	China	12.9	10.0	12.7	14.5	15.6	11.1	77	76	74	70	65
17	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	10.3	15.1	15.0	76	70	67	66	68
18	Iraq	14.1	14.6	14.0	14.8	13.9	4.6	76	78	82	76	79
19	Algeria	14.1	14.1	11.5	13.7	15.1	4.8	73	71	70	73	70
20	Mauritania	14.5	14.2	13.3	14.1	14.2	1.3	72	70	71	68	67
21	Uzbekistan	14.9	12.7	13.9	12.7	15.6	1.5	71	71	71	73	74
22	Colombia	11.8	8.9	13.1	11.3	10.4	15.4	71	68	67	62	58
23	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	12.5	9.6	13.8	15.6	71	68	67	66	48
24	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	12.2	15.6	70	68	66	68	70
25	Vietnam	11.8	9.6	12.8	14.6	14.4	6.9	70	71	72	72	70
26	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.3	13.6	14.1	15.7	0.6	70	69	70	70	69
27	Cuba	13.1	8.3	13.1	13.2	14.9	7.0	70	66	62	52	49
28	Niger	9.4	9.5	14.5	7.7	13.1	15.4	70	68	62	60	52
29	Morocco	13.2	13.8	10.9	12.2	14.5	4.8	69	69	67	66	63
30	Bangladesh	12.6	10.7	12.8	11.3	10.6	10.7	69	68	67	63	58
31	Laos	11.7	10.2	13.3	14.2	14.0	5.0	68	69	71	72	71
32	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.6	68	65	63	43	43
33	Indonesia	11.3	12.0	11.6	11.1	9.2	12.8	68	68	63	60	65
34	Qatar	14.2	14.1	10.5	13.2	14.4	1.5	68	74	67	66	62
35	Egypt	12.7	13.5	11.6	12.1	10.8	7.0	68	71	75	76	76
36	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.4	12.0	13.5	6.5	67	66	67	64	63
37	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	9.7	13.0	15.6	67	66	64	56	55
38	Mexico	10.3	8.3	12.5	11.0	10.5	13.9	67	65	64	60	61
39	Ethiopia	9.9	10.3	13.1	10.4	12.1	10.6	66	66	65	63	65
40	Bhutan	13.2	12.3	11.6	13.9	14.2	1.1	66	67	64	61	64
41	Turkey	12.8	11.5	11.8	13.0	11.5	5.7	66	65	69	63	66
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	1.5	66	63	62	57	56
43	Malaysia	12.8	14.3	11.4	12.2	11.1	3.9	66	63	63	62	60
44	Tajikistan	13.8	12.2	12.3	12.8	13.4	1.1	66	65	66	65	65
45	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	7.2	13.1	15.9	65	65	64	60	54
46	Brunei	14.8	14.6	10.1	10.9	14.4	0.4	65	64	64	63	63
47	Oman	14.0	14.1	10.3	13.3	12.9	0.6	65	66	63	62	59
48	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.6	11.9	12.7	14.2	1.1	65	64	64	64	63
49	Jordan	13.0	14.0	10.5	12.3	12.7	2.0	65	66	64	64	65
50	Nicaragua	10.8	5.9	11.9	12.8	13.6	9.4	65	56	51	41	41

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019
51	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.3	64	63	62	61	61
52	Kuwait	13.5	13.7	9.8	12.3	13.1	1.1	64	64	63	62	60
53	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.6	63	61	58	55	52
54	UAE	13.4	13.4	9.9	11.2	12.8	1.1	62	62	62	60	58
55	Nepal	12.0	9.8	9.4	13.0	12.6	4.4	61	64	66	64	64
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.3	0.6	60	59	56	56	56
57	Palestinian Territories	13.0	13.3	9.7	10.3	12.0	2.0	60	59	58	60	57
58	Azerbaijan	13.2	10.0	9.5	12.0	13.6	0.6	59	60	56	57	57
59	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.2	11.0	10.4	12.0	2.0	59	58	58	57	56
60	Chad	11.6	8.2	10.2	10.2	10.3	7.6	58	55	53	56	48
61	Russian Federation	12.3	7.9	10.3	11.8	12.8	2.0	57	56	57	60	60
62	Sri Lanka	12.8	9.1	10.6	11.3	9.5	3.9	57	63	62	65	58
63	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	11.7	8.9	57	50	42	42	41
64	Venezuela	6.0	4.6	11.7	10.2	11.4	11.7	56	51	39	42	41
65	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	11.1	55	52	48	48	43
66	Bahrain	12.7	13.3	8.7	10.7	8.8	0.9	55	57	56	55	55
67	Honduras	7.1	5.0	11.9	7.6	9.8	11.9	53	48	46	39	38
68	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	7.2	52	51	46	43	42
69	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	9.2	14.8	51	48	47	48	47
70	Togo	9.2	6.7	9.3	7.1	11.0	5.4	49	44	43	41	42
71	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	3.0	48	43	47	45	46
72	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	7.6	15.0	46	43	43	44	44
73	El Salvador	7.7	4.2	10.6	7.4	9.1	6.7	46	45	42	38	30
74	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	3.3	44	42	42	42	43
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	1.1	44	44	43	43	43
76	Belarus	9.5	3.8	4.8	9.4	12.1	3.3	43	33	30	28	35

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Sources and definitions

- This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD).
- Highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. In order to reduce the length of these reference sections, a table containing links to regularly used sources can be found at the beginning of the “Keys to Understanding” chapter under the heading “Links for general background information”. Where one of these sources has been quoted in the dossier text, a quote reference is supplied as indicated in the second column of the table.
- The WWL 2023 reporting period was 1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022.
- 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).

WWL 2023 Situation in brief / Nigeria

Brief country details

Nigeria: Population (UN estimate for 2022)	Christians	Chr%
216,747,000	100,420,000	46.3

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

Map of country



Nigeria: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	88	6
WWL 2022	87	7
WWL 2021	85	9
WWL 2020	80	12
WWL 2019	80	12

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 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, Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs, One's own (extended) family, Political parties, Organized crime cartels or networks, Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Ethno-religious hostility	Ethnic group leaders, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Non-Christian religious leaders, Government officials, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups
Dictatorial paranoia	Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Organized crime cartels or networks, Violent religious groups, Ideological pressure groups, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Non-Christian religious leaders
Organized corruption and crime	Violent religious groups, Government officials, Ethnic group leaders, Organized crime cartels or networks, Ideological pressure groups, Political parties, Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups, Non-Christian religious leaders

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

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

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

During the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari (2015 - 2023), Islamist violence increased. In addition to what already was happening, the government has failed to prevent the increase of brutal acts of violence of which many Nigerians are victims, but most particularly Christians - with impunity. Most of this violence is in the North, in the form of attacks by Boko Haram, Boko Haram split-off Islamic State in West Africa Province - ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed 'bandits', but it has also spread to the South. Such violence often causes loss of life, physical injury, rape and other forms of sexual harassment, as well as loss of property and destruction of

farmlands; abductions for ransom have increased considerably over recent years. As a result of the violence, Christians are being dispossessed of their land and means of livelihood. Many live as IDPs or refugees.

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

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, the Department of State Services (DSS), customs, Civil Defence Corps, prison service etc. The same applies increasingly for the judiciary in Nigeria, and for key economic sectors. A Nigerian analyst refers to this as "ethno-religious incursion of the establishment". The challenge in all this is increasing and systematic denial of religious freedom violations against Christians by the government.

The Islamic expansionist agenda is occurring against the background of climatic changes, environmental degradation and population growth, pushing the mainly Muslim Fulani herdsmen with their cattle southwards to the North-Central and to the southern zones. The stress this is causing on herder-farmer relationships - a classical theme in the history of mankind - is manipulated by political and religious leadership to further the agenda of Islamization. Especially now that Christian youth have begun to defend themselves increasingly against the violent attacks by Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen and armed 'bandits', the narrative becomes confusing, and the risk of [persecution eclipse](#) arises (WWR, WWL - Discussion of key themes, October 2022, p.13). Persecution eclipse is further increased by classifying what is happening in the country as 'sectarian violence', 'communal clashes' or 'civil unrest', as well as by the increasing use of the term 'bandits' or 'criminals' for the jihad-inspired perpetrators.

Summary of international obligations and rights violations

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

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

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

- The state is manifestly failing to protect Nigerian Christians' fundamental rights (ICCPR Art. 2)
- Christians are murdered in indiscriminate attacks (ICCPR Art. 6)
- Christian women are raped, gangraped and sexually abused (ICCPR Art. 7)

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

Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period

[12 May 2022](#): A female Christian student at Shehu Shagari College of education in Sokoto State was murdered in cold blood on 12 May 2022 by classmates for a WhatsApp comment allegedly insulting Islam (BBC News, 14 May 2022). Although the mob-killing was condemned by some leading Muslims, riots broke out in Sokoto with armed Muslim protestors demanding the release of the two suspected ringleaders who were arrested by the police and charged with ‘criminal conspiracy and inciting of [public disturbance](#)’ (Sahara Reporters, 16 May 2022).

[5 June 2022](#): An armed group burst into a Roman Catholic church in Owo, Ondo State, during a Pentecost Sunday service, killing worshippers over a period of 20-30 minutes with explosives and gunfire (BBC News, 6 June 2022). Later reports put the [number of Christians killed](#) at 40, with at least 60 wounded (Pulse NG, 23 June 2022).

Specific examples of positive developments

Positive developments listed in the WWL 2022 reporting period appeared less positive in the WWL 2023 reporting period.

ICC inquiry into Nigeria

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

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

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

Nigeria, Country of particular Concern

Michael R. Pompeo, US Secretary of State, announced on 7 December 2020 that the USA designated [Nigeria](#) as Country of Particular Concern under the International Religious Freedom

Act of 1998, as amended, for engaging in or tolerating “systematic, ongoing, egregious violations of religious freedom.”

Although this news was welcomed with enthusiasm by many Nigerians, as it held hope that it would push the regime of President Buhari to improve their record on religious freedom, less than 1 year later (17 November 2021) the designation of Nigeria as Country of Particular Concern was [officially ended](#) (WWR, 24 November 2021).

External Links - Situation in brief

- Brief description of the persecution situation: persecution eclipse - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/WWL-Discussion-of-key-themes-updated-October-2022.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: 12 May 2022: - <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-61450976>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: public disturbance - <https://saharareporters.com/2022/05/16/charges-%E2%80%98inciting-public-disturbance%E2%80%99-filed-against-suspected-killers-deborah-samuel-show>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: 5 June 2022 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-61707872>
- Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period: number of Christians killed - <https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/owo-massacre-president-buhari-says-church-attacks-politically-motivated/yvr68tv>
- Specific examples of positive developments: formal inquiry - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-55277712>
- Specific examples of positive developments: WWR, 3 May 2022 - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/nigeria-president-in-denial-as-experts-see-country-spinning-out-of-control/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: Nigeria - <https://www.state.gov/united-states-takes-action-against-violators-of-religious-freedom-2/>
- Specific examples of positive developments: officially ended - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/nigeria-usa-new-cpc-listing-usa-is-playing-a-very-dangerous-game/>

WWL 2023: Keys to understanding / Nigeria

Links for general background information

Name of report	Quote reference	Link	Last accessed on
Amnesty International 2021/22 country report – covering 154 countries	AI country report 2021/22 (pp. 276-280)	https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/POL1048702022ENGLISH.pdf	21 March 2023
BBC News country profile	BBC country profile	https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550	21 March 2023
Bertelsmann Transformation Index country report 2022 – covering 137 countries	BTI report 2022	https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/NGA	21 March 2023
CIA World Factbook	CIA Factbook	https://www.cia.gov/the-world-factbook/countries/nigeria/	21 March 2023
Crisis24 country report (Garda World)	Crisis24 country report	https://crisis24.garda.com/insights-intelligence/intelligence/country-reports/nigeria	21 March 2023
Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index 2021 – covering 167 countries	EIU 2021 (p.15)	https://pages.eiu.com/rs/753-RIQ-438/images/eiu-democracy-index-2021.pdf	21 March 2023
FFP's Fragile States Index 2022 – covering 179 countries	FSI 2022	https://fragilestatesindex.org/country-data/	21 March 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Democracy index (covering 29 countries, Nigeria not included)	Democracy index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/countries/nations-transit/scores	21 March 2023
Freedom House's 2023 Global Freedom index – covering 210 countries	Global Freedom Index 2023	https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-world/2023	21 March 2023
Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report – covering 70 countries	Freedom on the Net 2022	https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-net/2022	21 March 2023
Human Rights Watch World Report 2023 (country chapter) – covering 100+ countries	HRW 2023 country chapter	https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2023/country-chapters/nigeria	21 March 2023
Internet World Stats 2022	IWS 2022	https://www.internetworldstats.com/africa.htm#ng	21 March 2023
RSF's 2022 World Press Freedom Index – covering 180 countries	World Press Freedom 2022	https://rsf.org/en/nigeria	21 March 2023
Transparency International's 2021 Corruption Perceptions Index – covering 180 countries	CPI 2022	https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2022/index/nga	21 March 2023
UNDP's Global Human Development Indicators (country profile) – covering 191 countries/territories	HDI country data profile (2021)	https://hdr.undp.org/data-center/specific-country-data#/countries/NGA	21 March 2023
US State Department's 2021 International Religious Freedom country reports	IRFR 2021	https://www.state.gov/reports/2021-report-on-international-religious-freedom/nigeria/	21 March 2023
USCIRF 2022 country reports – covering 15 CPC / 12 SWL	USCIRF 2022	https://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/2022-04/2022%20Nigeria.pdf	21 March 2023
World Bank country overview – covering 178 countries	World Bank country overview 2022	https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview#1	21 March 2023
World Bank country profile data – covering 222 countries	World Bank profile (2021 data)	https://databank.worldbank.org/views/reports/reportwidget.aspx?Report_Name=CountryProfile&id=b450fd57tbar=ydd=yinf=nzm=ncountry=NGA	21 March 2023
World Bank's Macro Poverty Outlook 2022 (Sub-Saharan Africa, p.68-69)	Macro Poverty Outlook 2022	https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/bae48ff2f5c5a869546775b3f010735-0500062021/related/mpo-ssa.pdf	21 March 2023

Recent history

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

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. Upon the sudden death of the military dictator General Sani Abacha, General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar oversaw a quick transition to civilian rule and promulgated the new constitution. However, according to a leading representative of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), "the 1999 Constitution mentions 'Shariah' 73 times, 'Grand Khadi' 54 times, 'Islam' 28 times and 'Muslims' 10 times but [does not mention](#) the words 'Christ', 'Christian', 'Christianity' or 'church' even once" (The Cable, 30 September 2017).

Since the resumption of constitutional rule in Nigeria in 1999, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) emerged as the dominant party winning all presidential elections except the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. The country moved into a new chapter of history in May 2015 when Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat in the presidential election and passed power to the opposition, the All Progressive Congress (APC) with Muhammadu Buhari as president.

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

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

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

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

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

Violence is not limited to northern Nigeria alone but has spread to southern Nigeria too. In the three southern zones there is already violence being perpetrated by Fulani militants and 'bandits', including land-grabbing. According to a Nigerian analyst: "Eye-witnesses attested of the heavy presence of the Fulani migrants in Cross Rivers, Delta, Edo, Rivers, Abia, Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Ekiti, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo. The common criminal activities in the Southern States of Nigeria are killings, kidnapping, invasions and occupations of forests, massive migration and loitering with fire arms."

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

The presidential election held on 25 February 2023

As reported by [BBC News on 1 March 2023](#):

"Bola Tinubu, 70, has been declared the winner of Nigeria's most competitive election since the end of military rule in 1999. Widely credited with reshaping Nigeria's commercial hub Lagos, Mr Tinubu saw off a divided opposition party and a youth-backed third-party candidate and is set to replace President Muhammadu Buhari in May, unless the opposition claims of manipulation lead to a rerun."

Political and legal landscape

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

Christians have repeatedly been the targets of attacks and victims of severe violations of their fundamental rights. However, since the APC government came to power in 2015, the attacks have been more aggressive and daring. (In the 2015 elections, the APC defeated the PDP, a party considered more inclusive and sympathetic to Christian concerns.) Although the APC has denied being a pro-Islamic party, the fact that the situation for Christians deteriorated radically, strengthens the notion of the party supporting the Islamic expansionist agenda. Since the APC came to power, Christians have not only had to contend with attacks from Boko Haram and ISWAP, but also from militant Fulani and so-called armed 'bandits'. 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, particularly in northern Nigeria. There is no doubt that Muslims also suffer in the spreading violence, but Christians in certain regions face an existential threat if this trend of attacks continues.

As stated above (in: *Brief description of persecution situation*), since 2015, President Buhari's federal government has appointed Muslims to a number of significant posts and to 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, Tanko Muhammed, the then 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 drew intense criticism from secular and Christian commentators. In December 2019, the Chief Justice of Nigeria asked that [Sharia be taught in Arabic](#) in Nigeria's universities (Nairaland, 11 December 2019). In June 2022, Olukayode Ariwoola, also a Muslim, replaced him.

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

Gender perspective

The Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015 is Nigeria's first criminal legislation that recognizes a broad spectrum of violence - sexual, economic, physical, and psychological abuse - particularly against women and girls but is yet to be adopted by several Sharia-run northern states ([Partners West Africa Nigeria, VAPP Tracker, accessed April 2023](#)). Domestic violence within marriages is widespread; in the Islamic northern region, husbands are permitted to discipline their wives so long as no 'grievous' bodily harm is caused (CEDAW 2017), and in the South, the Criminal Code Act considers assault on a woman as a 'misdemeanor' as opposed to a 'felony' if the victim were a man ([2019 OECD report](#)). Nigeria also ratified the CEDAW Convention in 1985 and the Optional Protocol in 2004, but was criticized in a [2017 NGO Coalition Shadow Report](#) for tacitly permitting child marriage; the report called for an overhaul of national legislation to ensure CEDAW is adequately integrated throughout laws and policies (NGO Coalition Shadow Report, June 2017, "Report of Nigeria on Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women").

Three marital regimes (civil, customary and Islamic) operate concurrently and lack uniformity (OECD, 2019). The federal government has no jurisdiction over Islamic or customary marriages and as such early marriage and polygamy are widespread. Furthermore, marital laws are particularly confining for women and girls in the North and Nigeria’s plural legal system on marriage makes Christian girls vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. This is true especially in the context of Sharia law, where girls are regularly abducted by Muslim fellow-citizens, brought, for example, to the [Emir of Gashua’s palace](#) (Yobe state), and forced into marriage with Muslims (Daily Post, 6 November 2017).

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

Religious landscape

Nigeria: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	100,420,000	46.3
Muslim	100,369,000	46.3
Hindu	39,500	0.0
Buddhist	11,400	0.0
Ethno-religionist	15,217,000	7.0
Jewish	1,200	0.0
Bahai	51,500	0.0
Atheist	58,100	0.0
Agnostic	551,000	0.3
Other	28,100	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 April 2022)

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 2021 estimates, 46.3% of the population is Muslim, while 46.4% is Christian. Even though Nigeria is constitutionally a secular state with freedom of religion enshrined in the Constitution, the northern ruling elite have been giving preferential treatment to Muslims for decades and discriminating against Christians. Since 1999, Sharia law has been imposed in 12 northern states much to the detriment of Christians, causing a very high level of concern. Also, in many parts of northern Nigeria, and increasingly in southern Nigeria too, jihad-inspired militants are killing and displacing Christians and taking over their farmland. Abductions for ransom have increased considerably over recent years. A particular focus for attacks in the reporting period have been Benue State and southern Kaduna State. Little has been done to stop the violations against Christians in these (and other) areas.

Looking at the number of Christians [killed for their faith](#) in the different geopolitical zones in the period October 2019 - September 2022, most were killed in North-Central, followed by North-West, South-East, North-East, South-West and South-South (ORFA, 27 February 2023).

Although there is a religious fault-line between northern and southern Nigeria, the situation is not as clear-cut as it first appears. There are many Christians in the north and many Muslims are living in the south. The combined total of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is 92.6% of the population. The 7.0% Ethno-religionists are spread all over the country, though somewhat unequally.

The Christian population in the six geopolitical zones

- **NORTH-WEST:** These 7 states (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara) have 6,873,000 Christians (13%) out of a population of 54,822,000.
- **NORTH-CENTRAL:** These 6 states (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau) and FCT (Abuja) have 16,641,000 Christians (51%) out of a population of 32,767,000.
- **NORTH-EAST:** These 6 states (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe) have 6,354,000 Christians (22%) out of a population of 29,419,000.
- **SOUTH-WEST:** These 6 states (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo) have 28,286,000 Christians (66%) out of a population of 42,854,000.
- **SOUTH-SOUTH:** These 6 states (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers) have 23,193,000 Christians (72%) out of a population of 32,293,000.
- **SOUTH-EAST:** These 5 states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo) have 19,073,000 Christians (78%) out of a population of 24,593,000.

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.

According to IRFR 2021:

"Although accounting for far less than 1 percent of the population, there are also two distinct Jewish communities. The smallest of these are mostly foreigners, whom Israel and the diaspora recognize. A larger group of several thousand indigenous Nigerian Jews are not recognized internationally. There are also significant numbers of Sabbatarian groups, variously self-identifying as Christian, non-Christian, or neither. These groups include some that have adopted Jewish customs."

Economic landscape

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

According to the World Bank country overview (last updated: 31 March 2023):

- **Economic growth:** "The economy is projected to grow by an average of 2.9% per year between 2023 and 2025, only slightly above the estimated population growth rate of 2.4%. Growth will likely be driven by services, trade, and manufacturing."
- **Inflation:** "High inflation has also taken a toll on household's welfare and price increases in 2020-2022 have pushed more Nigerians into poverty."
- **Poverty:** "The deteriorating economic environment is leaving millions of Nigerians in poverty. On current trends, with Nigeria's population growth continuing to outpace poverty reduction, the number of Nigerians living below the national poverty line will rise by 13 million between 2019 and 2025. ... Inequality, in terms of income and opportunities, remains high and has adversely affected poverty reduction. The lack of job opportunities is at the core of the high poverty levels, regional inequality, and social and political unrest."

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

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

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

Gender perspective

Women are - in general - more economically vulnerable than men, due to gender gaps in regards to education and labor force participation rates (HDI 2020). Patrilineal inheritance practices and harmful practices against widows make it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence ([OECD, 2019](#)).

Social and cultural landscape

According to the UNDP's HDI profile and CIA Factbook:

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hausa 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo (Ibo) 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/Berberi 2.4%, Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw/Izon 1.8%, other 24.7% (2018 est.)
- **Main languages:** English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, over 500 additional indigenous languages
- **Urban population:** 51.2% of total population
- **Rate of urbanization:** 4.23%
- **Literacy rate (adult, ages 15 and older):** 62.0% (female: 52.7%; male: 71.3%)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 10 years (female: 9.4 years; male: 10.6 years)
- **Mean years of schooling:** 6.7 years (female: 5.7 years; male: 7.7 years)
- **Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24):** 22.0
- **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 25 June 2021: "Nigeria has the largest population in Africa. The United Nations project that the overall population of Nigeria will reach about 401.31 million by the end of the year 2050. By 2100, if current figures continue, the population of Nigeria will be over 728 million."
- **Population growth:** 2.6% (2018 estimate)
- **Median age:** 18.1 years
- **Life expectancy at birth:** 54.7 years (Female: [55.6](#), Male: [53.8](#))
- **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 the [UNHCR Country data](#) (accessed 11 April 2023):

- **IDPs/Refugees:** As of 28 February 2023, there were 92,133 registered refugees (the vast majority from Cameroon). As of 30 March 2022, there were 3,167,581 IDPs (of these, 2,197,824 were in North-East).

According to UNDP's HDI country data profile (Data updates as of 8 September 2022):

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

Demographic developments might shift the precarious balance in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians. 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 (see above: Political and legal landscape), suggests that for some, democracy has become 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.

In this socio-cultural setting, the situation of converts from Islam to Christianity is harshest. While in the Sharia states all Christians can be confronted with education and employment difficulties, converts often have to flee for fear of their lives, and leave everything behind.

Gender perspective

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

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

Technological landscape

According to Internet World Stats (IWS 2022)

- **Internet usage:** 67.5% penetration - survey date: December 2021 (most recent survey at time of writing)
- **Facebook usage:** 16.1% penetration – survey date: January 2022. According to [Napoleon Cat \(February 2023\)](#), 58.3% of Facebook users are male, compared to 41.7% female users.

According to UNDP's HDI country data profile:

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

According to Freedom House's Freedom on the Net 2022 report:

- Nigeria is categorized as 'partly free' with a score of 57 points out of 100.
- "Internet freedom remains under threat in Nigeria. After Twitter censored a tweet by President Buhari that seemingly threatened violence against Biafran secessionists, the Nigerian government blocked Twitter on most networks for seven months. Legislation that would reshape the legal landscape for internet content in Nigeria, including a data protection bill and a bill that would expand intermediary liability for service providers, remained under consideration at the end of the coverage period [May 2022]."
- "Online journalists continue to be subjected to extralegal harassment and intimidation."

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

Security situation

Over the years, violence from many different non-state actors in Nigeria has grown, leading to a very high degree of insecurity. Nigeria has developed a 'culture of violence'. The failure of the federal and state authorities to turn the tide has certainly contributed to it. There are many reasons behind this but WWL sees as a guiding principle the push towards the Islamization of Nigeria. This has been going on for many years and might well be continued by President Buhari's [successor in the 2023 contested election](#), Bola Tunubu. Not only Christians but also many Muslims and other Nigerians are victims of this Islamization. In WWL terminology, this is called *Islamic oppression*. It is however combined with *Ethno-religious hostility* because militants from the Fulani ethnic group seem to be at the core of the Islamization process.

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

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

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

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

Although answers to these questions are important for strategically working towards reconciliation and restoration of peace in the country, WWR thinks that trying to provide an exact answer is less important than the impact jihad and banditry have had on the population of Nigeria, in particular on Christian communities. A report by the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) shows that the combined impact of all those terror groups was devastating (ORFA, [Killings and Abductions in Nigeria 2019-2022](#), February 2023, p.3):

- *Most attacks by 'Terror Groups' are against geographic communities, and these are more often Christian communities than Muslim communities. Apart from causing direct harm, these attacks also destabilize communities, negatively affecting the survival of the victims, in particular Christians.*

- *'Terror Groups' frequently engage in abductions. In this way they put additional pressure on civilians and religious communities, impoverishing them by demanding (excessive) ransom payments, and by creating serious trauma, while financing their own destructive operations. It applies for all, but Christians and churches are most often their victims.*

While the security situation in Nigeria has become very problematic, there has been a rather strong suspicion about the role of the Federal government's security apparatus in the country. In the past years, several cases were reported in which the security forces failed to protect citizens against attacks from violent groups. They either did not act or arrived too late at the scene of the violence. Sometimes they were even suspected of having a more active role in the violence itself. (For more details on this, please see the [WWL 2022 Nigeria Full Country Dossier](#), pp.23-24.)

The ORFA report quoted above, shows that there was a significant increase in the number of members of terror groups killed over the period October 2019 to September 2022: A rise from 297 in the first year to 5,675 in the third year (nearly 20 times as many). Although some trend distortion might have occurred due to adaptations in the focus of data gathering, it is clear that in the 2022 period many more members of terror groups were killed than in the foregoing periods. Most of them were killed by the security forces, others by vigilantes.

This increase in members of terror groups killed might indicate that the Federal government's security forces were taking more effective action against the perpetrators of violence in the country. However, a series of reports by Reuters in December 2022 started a discussion about whether the many members of these terror groups reportedly killed were always genuine perpetrators. The reports question whether the perpetrators killed may possibly have been in part normal citizens suspected of being perpetrators (or at least of actively collaborating with them). The reports even went so far as to question whether the alleged perpetrators may sometimes have been innocent citizens killed to feign the effectiveness of the security forces in combatting perpetrators, in particular those connected with Boko Haram (Reuters, [Nightmare in Nigeria - The army's secret campaigns to crush Boko Haram](#), December 2022).

The statistics supplied by ORFA show that in the reporting period with the highest number of terror group members killed, the numbers of killings and abductions did not fall; on the contrary, they significantly increased. (This does not necessarily prove that the security forces failed to eliminate members of terror groups on a large enough scale. It is possible that the terror groups had meanwhile grown stronger, and would have created even greater insecurity in the country had not many members been killed. Still, government pressure on the security forces might have pushed them into producing 'fake successes' in combatting the insurgents.) Apart from leading to innocent victims being killed, the suspicion of such behavior by the security forces can also lead to bitterness and thus greater willingness on the part of youth to join the ranks of terror groups, thus aggravating the insecurity in the country.

Corruption is also a major concern in Nigeria. The violent attacks on Christians and Christian communities are partly 'fall-out' from systemic corruption and are kept on-going through the emergence of a 'conflict industry', which in turn is sustained by a culture of impunity. A conflict industry is where some people benefit economically from conflict. Such beneficiaries could be Muslim or Christian. For example, some people import and/or sell weapons to belligerent groups

or even army uniforms to Boko Haram or ISWAP insurgents, Fulani militants and armed bandits. The lucrative economic benefits from such activity induces the officials involved to look the other way rather than challenge corrupt practices that compromise the security of citizens. Hence, conflict has become a money-making enterprise.

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

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

A [public poll](#) conducted in 2019 revealed that 85% of Nigerians recognized rape as prevalent in the country (NOIPOLLS, 25 July 2019). Whilst there are statutory laws that criminalize rape, in the rare incidents that rape crimes are reported (due to feelings of shame and fear of stigmatization), convictions are seldom reached due to outdated and inconsistent penal laws and court proceedings ([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 long been struggling with deep-rooted issues. Due to the country's size (in terms of geography, population and levels of natural resources), it has the potential to be a strong force on the continent. However, the political instability, insecurity and rampant corruption that have characterized the country for decades and still persist, have weakened it considerably. Regional, ethnic and religious tensions exacerbate the problem. The extent to which these issues are addressed will determine whether or not Nigeria will be able to realize its potential and become a prosperous and stable country. However, the current trends in the country seem to indicate that Nigeria will continue to be a country struggling to stay afloat.

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

The rise of Boko Haram in the last decade has made the situation even more complex. Since President Buhari came to power, military offensives led to the decimation of Boko Haram in numbers. But Boko Haram militants have shown their resilience by moving to weak neighboring countries, and rebuilding their strength in Nigeria too. ISWAP added to the spectrum of violent

Islamic groups. There are also numerous attacks by Fulani militants and armed bandits in the north, even in the south, and the government has not produced any working plan to solve the crisis. Boko Haram, ISWAP, the Fulani militants and armed bandits possess types and quantities of weapons that raise questions about their origin. One of the sources is almost certainly Turkey ([CBN News](#), 14 November 2019; [Gatestone Institute](#), 3 November 2019). Indeed, there are allegations that at least since December 2014, Turkey has been supporting and supplying weapons to both Boko Haram and the Nigerian armed forces ([RLPB 680: Nigerian Elections 3: Buhari's Legacy, 15 February 2023](#)). Similarly, there are allegations that corruption in Nigerian government circles has been prolonging the conflict by supplying weapons to jihadists. It is claimed that fake contracts for provisions and equipment could have totaled as much as US\$15 billion ([Religious Liberty Monitoring](#), 28 May 2019). Meanwhile, Nigeria has been reaching out to Iran for both military equipment and training ([Iran Press](#), 4 September 2022). If the ethno-religious hostilities further develop along the existing lines, Christian vulnerability will be unimaginable.

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

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

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

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

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.

4) Christians have allegedly begun to organize their own defense

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

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

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

External Links - Keys to understanding

- Recent history: does not mention - <https://www.thecable.ng/review-secularity-nigerian-1999-constitution>
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- Economic landscape: ruling - <https://www.rechtspraak.nl/Organisatie-en-contact/Organisatie/Gerechtshoven/Gerechtshof-Den-Haag/Nieuws/Paginas/Shell-Nigeria-liable-for-oil-spills-in-Nigeria.aspx>
- Economic landscape: OECD, 2019 - <https://www.genderindex.org/wp-content/uploads/files/datasheets/2019/NG.pdf>
- Social and cultural landscape: World Population Review - <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/nigeria-population>
- Social and cultural landscape: 55.6 - <https://www.undp.org/nigeria/publications/2020-human-development-report>
- Social and cultural landscape: 53.8 - <https://www.undp.org/nigeria/publications/2020-human-development-report>
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- Security situation: BBC News, 13 December 2021 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-59614595>
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- Security situation: Amnesty International, 2021 - <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2021/11/nigeria-failure-to-tackle-rape-crisis-emboldens-perpetrators-and-silences-survivors/>
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WWL 2023: 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, last accessed 13 April 2023). He played a key role in evangelizing in Yorubaland. After witnessing the success of Crowther, Anglicans of the Church Missionary Society, Methodists, Baptists and Roman Catholics all increased efforts to have a strong Christian presence in Nigeria.

As Christianity started to flourish in Nigeria, issues of discrimination, marginalization of African elites and disputes over resources etc. started pitting Christians against Christians and many church divisions resulted. The United Native African Church and the African Church (Bethel) broke away from the Anglican Church in 1891 and 1901 respectively. In 1917 the United African Methodist Church seceded from the Methodist Church. Since 1950, Pentecostal churches have become very visible, some of the major ones being the Redeemed Christian Church of God, the Deeper Life Bible Church and the Mountain of Fire and Miracles Church. There are also many

other Pentecostal groups such as the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, the Full Gospel Businessmen Fellowship International, Youth with a Mission and Christ for all Nations.

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

Church spectrum today

Nigeria: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	3,000	0.0
Catholic	26,667,000	26.6
Protestant	62,790,000	62.5
Independent	29,157,000	29.0
Unaffiliated	147,000	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-18,343,000	-18.3
Total	100,421,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	47,996,000	47.8
Renewalist movement	63,816,000	63.5

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds, *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2022)

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

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



Areas where Christians face most difficulties

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

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

The situation of basic rights violations in the 12 Sharia states could 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% (12,321,000 Christians out of a population of 82,271,000). Apart from direct violence, Christians face all sorts of pressure in different areas of life. The various forms of pressure are indicated below in the section *Pressure in the 5 spheres of life*.

The situation of basic rights violations in the 7 remaining states (Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Taraba) is more or less comparable with the 12 Sharia states. [Please note that FCT (Abuja) is not classified as a state and is thus not included.] Their Christian population totals 51% (15,544,000 Christians out of a population of 30,745,000). The Christians in these states are also confronted with a mixture of violence and 'dhimmitude' in the Muslim-majority areas within these states. However, the emphasis is on violence, committed mainly by Fulani militants and armed bandits, although Boko Haram and ISWAP increasingly have their part in it too. It is also important to realize that both Boko Haram, ISWAP and 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 and others are abducted. Often men and boys are killed, with women and girls being abducted. Many flee from their houses and fields. There is constant fear: When night falls, there is always the danger of possible attack, and anxiety about what might happen to oneself and one's family. If a husband or older sons are killed, the wife/mother and younger children are left behind in a state of great vulnerability. When a wife or daughter is abducted, a man is left tormented by the thoughts of what might be happening to her. (For more information, see below: *Violence section*.)

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

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

Until recently the south-eastern part of the country was relatively peaceful. That has changed. According to a [Global Sentinel report on 28 May 2020](#), the Nigerian rights group Intersociety claimed (in a special report on issues affecting Igbo people of South-East and South-South zones) that "not less than 350 Igbo communities, villages and other locations are now invaded and permanently occupied by the Jihadist Fulani Herdsmen and 'imported' Shuwa Arabs, also called 'Cowmen' in Arabic." The number was 139 communities in August 2019, and rose to 350 in May 2020. Intersociety states that the alleged occupation "is vicariously, if not directly aided by the Government of Nigeria and its security agencies especially the Army and the Police." Further research revealed that the invasion and permanente 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). During the WWL 2022 and WWL 2023 reporting periods the situation has not much improved.

It could be argued that the whole country is increasingly becoming a hotspot for religious freedom violations, as explained in the various sections of this dossier.

Christian communities and how they are affected

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

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

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

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

How does the persecution situation affect the growth of the Church in Nigeria? According to a Nigerian analyst writing about the WWL 2022 situation: "Ironically, rather than the Church shrinking rapidly, many more people are converting to Christian faith. Many of our participants during this year's focus group discussions alluded to the fact that they are receiving a constant flow of new believers, they say now the problem is where to keep them and how to care for them; the Church is getting stronger despite persecution." This trend has reportedly continued into the WWL 2023 reporting period.

External Links - Church information

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WWL 2023: Persecution Dynamics / Nigeria

Reporting period

1 October 2021 - 30 September 2022

Position on the World Watch List

Nigeria: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2023	88	6
WWL 2022	87	7
WWL 2021	85	9
WWL 2020	80	12
WWL 2019	80	12

Ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2019-2023 reporting periods

The rise of one point is due to pressure rising in the *Community* and *National spheres of life*, while the violence score remains at the maximum level. The rise in pressure is only small (both spheres of life 0.3 point). Basically the situation remained largely the same for both pressure and violence. Christians continue to be attacked indiscriminately and brutally in northern Nigeria and the violence and insecurity has also spread to southern Nigeria. Fulani militants and 'bandits' have settled in southern forests, making access to farmlands increasingly difficult for Christians farmers.

Persecution engines

Nigeria: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethno-religious hostility	ERH	Very strong
Clan oppression	CO	Weak
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post-Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all

Nigeria: Persecution engines	Abbreviation	Level of influence
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.)

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 outgoing President Buhari suggests it is not so much about policies but more about ‘agitation’, in other words, about creating or allowing for chaos or impunity to prevail.

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

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

Important to note that there is increasing tension between the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. Anecdotal evidence speaks of hostilities of Fulanis against Hausas, in particular in the northwestern States Sokoto and Zamfara. According to a Nigerian analyst, “Hausas and Fulanis feuds are growing by the day; it may likely snowball into full blown war in the near future due

to the gradual understanding of age long domination by Fulanis on Hausas.”

In northern Nigeria violence committed in the name of Islam by Boko Haram and ISWAP against civilians, and especially against Christians, is rampant. The same applies for violence committed by Fulani militants and so-called armed bandits. As explained above (see above: *Trends analysis*), 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 but also the southern states. Clear examples of land-grabbing and related violence by Fulani militants, can already be seen in many southern states (see above: *Recent history*).

Until recently, the Islamic expansionist agenda was mainly driven at state level. However, under the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari, Christians increasingly felt that this process was being enabled at national level (at the level of the federal government). This was particularly evident in the government’s policy of key nominations (see above: *Political and legal landscape*) and in the way a climate of impunity is allowed which mainly benefits the activities of the various violent Islamic groups, as well as other criminal groups. For further details, see above: Security situation, which also indicates how systemic corruption contributes to the increasing Islamization of Nigeria.

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

Drivers of persecution

Nigeria: Drivers of persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG	WEAK				VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Very strong		Strong	-				Very strong	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very strong		Very strong	Weak				Strong	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong		Strong	-				Medium	Medium
Religious leaders of other churches	-		-	-				-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong		Very strong	-				Strong	Very strong

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

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

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

- Government officials (Very strong to Strong):** Islamic expansion in Nigeria has increased under the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari. It seems that the president is using his position to appoint Muslims to key positions in the country, and to allow a culture of impunity that makes it possible for violations against Christians to go largely unnoticed. (This is an example of '[persecution eclipse](#)' – see: WWL Discussion of key themes, October 2022, p.13.) The governments (and non-state actors) of the 12 Sharia states were already on the same track, but they may thus feel encouraged to further Islamize their states instead of guaranteeing the elementary rights of their Christian citizens (freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of expression). Governments (and non-state actors) in other states might also feel encouraged, or sometimes forced, to promote (further) Islamization of their states, even in the South: In particular, by not being able to protect their citizens against violence from Islamic militants, given that the security apparatus is not under their command. Some state governments are trying to protect their whole citizenry, but with limited resources.
- Ethnic group leaders (Very strong [to Weak]):** Ethnic group leaders as drivers of persecution and discrimination have two dimensions: One 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 and discrimination between ethnic groups with different religions. In the past, when ATR was dominant, rights violations of Christian converts by

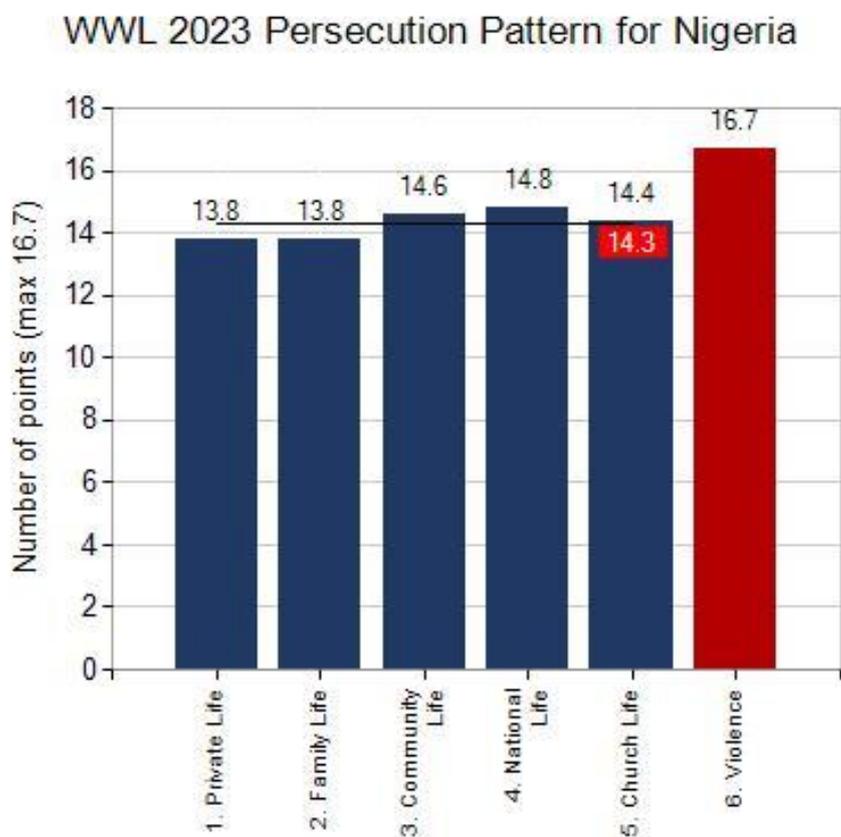
adherents of ATR was common, but violations in this context have gradually reduced and come now primarily from the Muslim Hausa-Fulani group (together with the Kanuris). Unlike the south of Nigeria which has ethnic tribal chiefs, most northern tribes have religious rulers or emirs instead. Many of them subscribe to the agenda of furthering the Islamization of their ethnic groups and beyond.

- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very Strong [to Medium]):** Many Muslim religious leaders have been sources of basic rights violations against Christians at the level of religious ideology, intolerant messaging and incitement.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong to Strong):** There are various violent groups but in the context of WWL analysis the most prominent ones are Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani militants and armed bandits (see above: *Security situation*).
- **Ideological pressure groups (Very strong to Strong):** The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) deserves a special mention here: Not all Fulani herdsmen are violent militants and some even feel victimized because they are Fulani although they have not been involved in violent attacks. However, the activities of MACBAN have become highly politicized in recent times because of links to powerful patrons, including the outgoing President of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto. MACBAN gives protection to Fulani militants and justification for their aggression. The outgoing President of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto have continually shown tacit support for the expansionist agenda of the Fulani militants. MACBAN claims to be a socio-cultural group, representing the interest of cattle rearers all over Nigeria, but essentially, they are very focused on ethnicity in their composition and outlook. It is important to note that many of the Fulani herdsmen are mere fronts for influential people who actually own the cattle. There are also many Fulani Christians and non-Fulanis who own plenty of cows in Nigeria today. MACBAN does not treat them as bona fide members. MACBAN seeks to defend the course which Fulani Muslims are taking, including justifying their violence against farmers. Fulani settlers are diverse. They are not all linked to Fulani herdsmen beyond sharing ethnic and religious identity. Many Fulani settlers who are Muslim are known to work with their Hausa Muslim counterparts to suppress Christians politically, socially and economically within their domains.
- **Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs (Strong [to Weak]):** Apart from the hostility from state and organized non-state actors, another source of persecution and intolerance is the 'street violence' where Muslims in the local community riot and attack Christians for flimsy reasons or false accusations of blasphemy in northern Nigeria. This occurs mostly in the context of the Persecution engine Islamic oppression. A Muslim 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 north-central zone) 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 fueled by developments at national level under Buhari's presidency.)

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

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2023 persecution pattern for Nigeria shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nigeria is extremely high at a level of 14.3 points, 0.1 point more than in WWL 2022.
- All *spheres of life* scored 13.8 points or more out of the maximum of 16.7, thus all recording extreme levels of pressure.
- The score for violence is the maximum possible (16.7 points). Over the last years (WWL 2015 - WWL 2023), Nigeria's violence score has repeatedly reached the maximum level, only dipping in WWL 2017 and WWL 2018 to scores of 16.1 and 16.5 points respectively.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, four questions have been selected from the WWL 2023 questionnaire for brief commentary and explanation. The selection usually (but not always) reflects the highest scoring elements. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored on a scale of 0-4 points, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

Block 1.5: It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols. (3.50 points)

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

Block 1.8: It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with those other than immediate family (extended family, others). (3.50 points)

In the three northern zones 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 can happen there too. In addition, public exposure can be a risk for other Christians during attacks and sometimes in IDP situations.

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

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

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

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

Block 1: Additional information

Private life is under serious pressure for converts from Islam to Christianity. They often have to hide their conversion for fear of discovery, or flee to prevent their new faith being discovered. The increasing Islamization in the country has not improved this situation in the WWL 2023 reporting period. But there is more to consider: Even non-converts can be in danger for the simple fact of being recognized as Christians, for instance at roadblocks, at school or in their villages. Many Christians in the North live in IDP situations where they sometimes also have to keep a low profile. This is especially true for Christian girls and women. All this makes it difficult to simply be a Christian - not only in the North, but also to a lesser degree in the South.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. The violence committed by violent Islamic militants has caused many Christians to be separated from their loved ones. Many have been forced to leave their families either in an IDP camp or other safe location, and then to go to other places to find jobs to support their families. Or they remain in the more dangerous regions for the same reason. Parents and children are also separated from each other through abduction: [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 2.9: Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents' faith. (3.50 points)

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

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

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

Block 2.8: Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education. (3.25 points)

In almost all Sharia states, the school subject "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. (3.75 points)

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

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

According to a Nigerian analyst: "Islam within northern Nigeria uses everything possible to pressure Christians into leaving the Christian faith, be it money, land-grabbing, forceful abduction or denial of rights. Many minority Christian groups have been denied access to basic social amenities in an attempt to force them to accept Islam. Because of high levels of poverty, money is also being used to entice Christian youth to leave the Christian faith. Many young girls and women have been put under immense pressure to denounce Christianity to join Islam because of false promises of comfort and luxury. It's a constant battle for Christians. They make you suffer, then offer solutions with the condition of accepting Islam for you to get the help." Apart from what is happening in northern Nigeria, there also is pressure in southern Nigeria: Another Nigerian analyst added that pressure on Christians to renounce their faith "is very common in the government ministries, companies and other social places".

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

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. It has two dimensions: One is about Christians living in the same locality as Muslims and not being allowed access to the water well or local dispensary, because the Christians are deemed 'impure'. Another is about the local or state authorities. Social amenities from the government do not reach Christian communities as they ought to. Often they just receive a token amount. With respect to the provision of infrastructural development, more is invested in Muslim-dominated areas than in

Christian-dominated ones in states where Christians and Muslims are almost an equal 50-50 percentage. Some Christian communities in rural areas have been completely denied water and have to trek for hours to fetch water. Even in cities, the Christian quarters are sometimes denied amenities such as sanitation services. Furthermore, there are many Christian IDPs in the northern zones. However, Nigerian relief agencies tend to be biased when it comes to the distribution of relief items: Christians are often left out and relief agencies in Nigeria are known not to respond swiftly when emergencies involve large numbers of Christians. Even when humanitarian aid is brought, it is often [grossly inadequate](#) (WWR, Nigeria: Assessment of Christian situation in 4 north-eastern states (June 2017), published May 2018).

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

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

Pressure in Block 4 / National sphere

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 frequently misused as channels for oppressing Christians. There is gross inequality in the administration of justice, since the majority of judges are Muslim 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 would not even be charged for in the first place. At times Christians even face charges in Sharia courts which have no jurisdiction over them. Their evidence is worth half of that of a Muslim.

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

In a climate of ‘agitation’, chaos, impunity and 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. Several well-known Christians were called for interrogation by the security services after having negatively commented on the situation of insecurity in the country and the weak performance of the federal government in relation thereto.

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

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South (see above: Areas where Christians face most difficulties). In 2019, the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) released statistics of church leaders attacked, abducted or killed (many of whom had been speaking out about the persecution situation). This trend has continued into the WWL 2022 and WWL 2023 reporting periods with pastors and their family members being regularly targeted ([Vanguard, 19 June 2022](#) and [Leadership NG, June 2022](#)). Some have even been killed after a ransom was collected.

Harassment has, however, often taken on lighter forms than those leading to abduction or death. Nevertheless, they have still been very disturbing for the pastors and their families, as well as for their church communities.

Block 5.1: 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 above: *Areas where Christians face most difficulties*). The activities of churches have been disrupted by constant attacks on Christian communities and by the destruction of church-buildings and executions or abductions of pastors and Christians in general. Such actions might have a long-term impact – many Christians do not dare to attend church services anymore and church activities are often cancelled due to the high level of insecurity. Sometimes the security men deployed by the authorities to protect Christian worshippers cannot be trusted and may act as informers or not give any protection. The activities of churches are also monitored, obstructed or hindered in less intrusive ways from time to time.

Block 5.3: Christian communities have been hindered in building or renovating church buildings or in claiming historical religious premises and places of worship which had been taken from them earlier. (3.50 points)

In several of the northern states, Christians are denied access to land for building churches. According to Nigerian analysts, any building and/or renovation of churches is greatly hindered in all the Sharia states in Nigeria. Even when official permission is given for churches to be built, the physical design and structure of the building is determined by the authorities. The goal is to keep churches hidden. Non-state actors are also a severe problem, for instance: Communities in Daura (Katsina state) recently demolished some churches in their locality, vowing not to allow the presence of any church building in the area. Thus, violence (mostly through non-state actors) adds to this already precarious situation for churches and public Christian property.

Violence

Violence is defined in WWL Methodology as the deprivation of physical freedom or as bodily harm to Christians or damage to their property. It includes severe threats (mental abuse). The table is based on reported cases as much as possible, but since many incidents go unreported, the numbers must be understood as being minimum figures. The following 5 points should be considered when using the data provided in the Block 6 table:

1. Some incidents go unreported because the Christians involved choose not to speak about the hostility being faced. Possible reasons for this may be:

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

2. Other incidents go unreported for the following possible reasons:

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

3. For further discussion (with a focus on the complexity of assessing the numbers of Christians killed for their faith) please see World Watch Monitor’s article dated 13 November 2013 available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2013/11/number-of-christian-martyrs-continues-to-cause-debate/>.

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

Nigeria: Violence Block question	WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	5014	4650
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?	100 *	470
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	54	17
6.4 How many Christians have been sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment, or similar things for faith-related reasons?	10 *	10 *
6.5 How many Christians have been abducted for faith-related reasons (including Christians missing in a persecution context)?	4726	2510
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	1000 *	1000 *
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	100 *	100 *

Nigeria: Violence Block question		WWL 2023	WWL 2022
6.8	How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10000 *	10000 *
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 *	1000 *
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?	10000 *	10000 *
6.12	How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	100 *	1000 *

The number of Christians killed has risen from 4,650 (in WWL 2022) to 5,014 in the WWL 2023 reporting period - an 8% increase. For abductions the rise is from 2510 (WWL 2022) to 4,726 (WWL 2023) – an 88% increase.

The number of churches attacked or closed was 470 (WWL 2022); for the WWL 2023 reporting period the symbolic number 100* has been used. This number must be understood to be a very low indication. Apart from direct acts of destruction against churches, the number also includes churches that stopped functioning after village communities were raided or occupied. A large number of Christian villages have been affected.

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

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

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

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

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

5 Year trends

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

5 Year trends: Average pressure

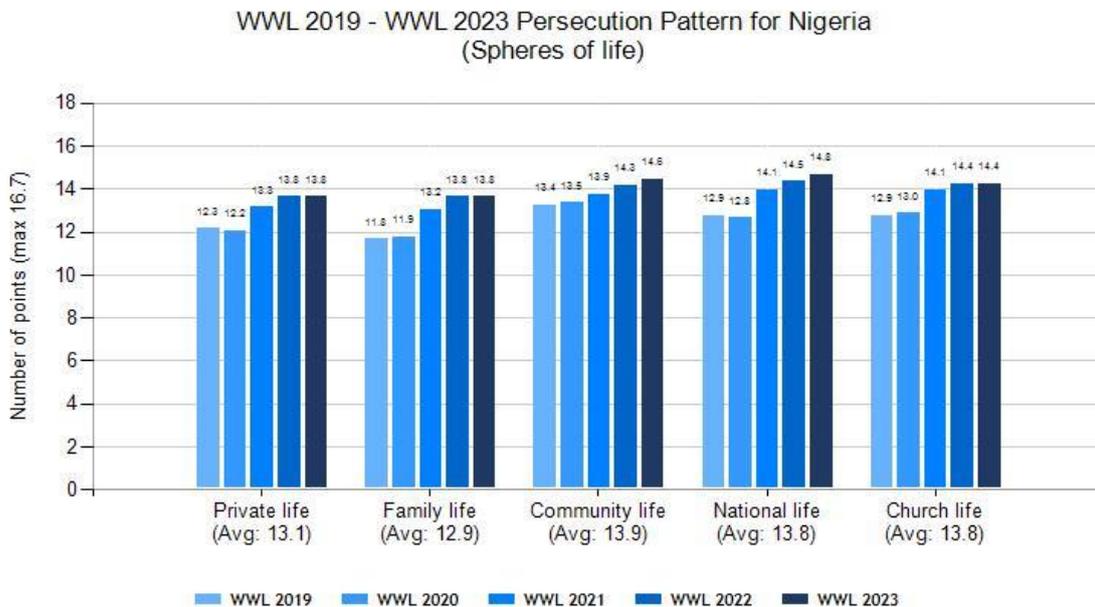
Nigeria: WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern history	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2023	14.3
2022	14.2
2021	13.7
2020	12.7
2019	12.7

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; for WWL 2017: 12.3 points; for WWL 2018: 12.1 points.

The WWL 2015 reporting period covered the year before the elections that removed President Goodluck Jonathan from office. 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 has caused further deterioration in the country’s situation for all Nigerians and especially for Christians. By the end of President Buhari’s second term, the situation was getting very precarious.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



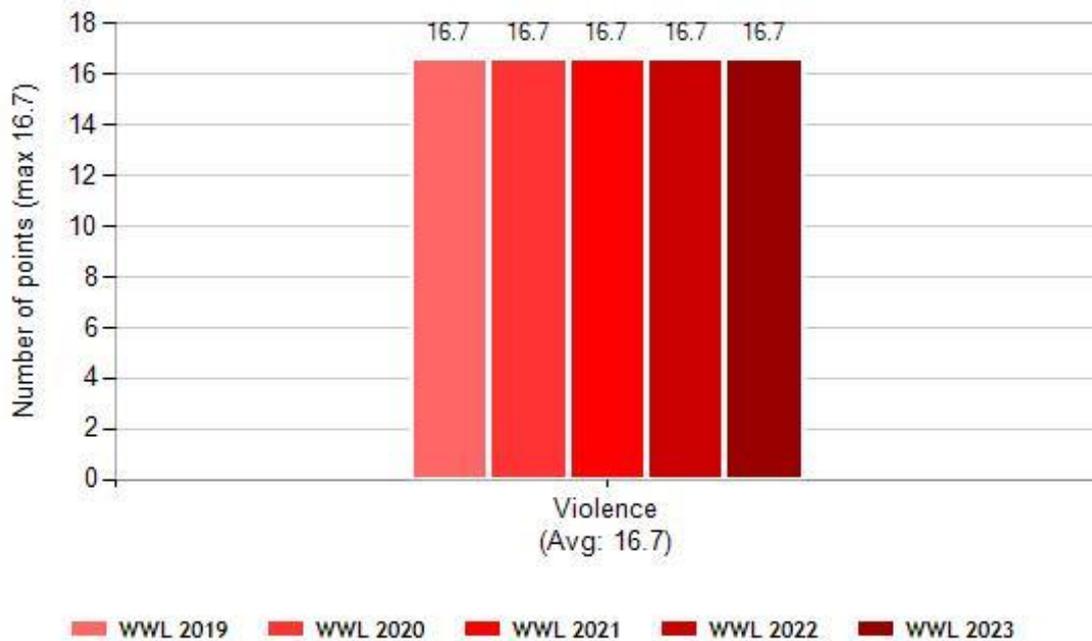
There has been a distinct increase in the scores for pressure in the different spheres of life over the last five WWL reporting periods. The differences between the lowest and highest values is 1.6 points for *Private life*, 2.0 for *Family life*, 1.2 for *Community life*, 2.0 for *National life* and 1.5 for *Church life*. This pattern reflects the gradual process of Islamization taking place under Buhari’s presidency. In situations of high levels of jihadist activity, combined with almost total impunity, non-violent forms of hostility against Christians (and others) rise too.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

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

Over the last 10 years, the score for violence in Nigeria has 7 times been the maximum score (16.7 points). As described above in the Section on Violence, behind these scores a world of suffering is hidden. Indeed, the number of Christians killed in Nigeria has been the bulk of the global totals for Christians killed for many years. This is not only linked to the size of the Church - the number of Christians even in the north of Nigeria is quite large - but above all to the dynamics of unceasing jihadist violence in the country.

WWL 2019 - WWL 2023 Persecution Pattern for Nigeria (Violence)



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

Group	Female Pressure Points
Economic	Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied custody of children; Forced marriage
Security	Abduction; Forced to flee town/country; Incarceration by family (house arrest); Targeted Seduction; Trafficking; Violence – death; Violence – physical; Violence – sexual
Social and Cultural	Denied access to social community/networks; Enforced religious dress code; Violence – psychological; Violence – Verbal
Technological	-

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

women and girls in the camps have been either raped by bandits or kidnappers. Apart from what happened in the camps, about eighty percent of kidnapped victims that are women have been raped by their captors.”

Abduction is used regularly to impoverish Christian families. Christian girls are sometimes abducted to be trafficked by radical Islamic religious leaders for the purpose of forced conversion and forced marriage – even women who are already married. An expert comments: “Of late, emirs have provided a special covering for abductors of minors. They collect the minors from the abductors and convert them to Islam, then marry them off to willing Muslims, who often rape the minors to impregnate them. The emirs act like their parents, while their biological parents are denied access to them.” When parents try to rescue their child, they commonly face resistance from the community, police and judiciary, who argue that the marriage is legitimate under Islamic law and the girl has accepted Islam. In addition to being “married”, girls abducted by militants have reportedly been used as human shields or as leverage in negotiations with the government or their families.

The fear that something will happen with their Christian daughters causes many Christian parents to push for early marriage as a kind of protection. This, alongside laws permitting under-age marriage in some states, contributes to the high early marriage rate for girls ([Girls Not Brides, accessed 21 November 2022](#)). Some Christian parents also choose to keep their girls at home, due to the dangers girls face travelling to and at school; this compounds the dependency of women and girls on men and fosters illiteracy about their rights. School abductions have also led to parents sending their daughters to safer states for education. Those remaining in schools in northern states are forced to wear Islamic code uniforms; the wearing of hijab, for instance, is compulsory for all female students in Sharia-run states.

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

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

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Group	Male Pressure Points
Economic	Denied inheritance or possessions; Discrimination/harassment via education; Economic harassment via business/job/work access
Political and Legal	Denied access to Christian religious materials, teachings and rites; Imprisonment by government
Security	Abduction; Forced out of home – expulsion; Forced to flee town/country; Military/militia conscription/service against conscience; Violence – death; Violence – physical
Social and Cultural	Violence – psychological
Technological	-

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

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

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

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

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

Persecution of other religious minorities

Adherents of ATR

In the WWL 2023 reporting period there were several reports about adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) facing hostility. The number of adherents of ATR killed in the context of terror groups was 40, the number of adherents of ATR abducted in that same context was 133, according to a report published by the Observatory on Religious Freedom in Africa in February 2023 ([ORFA, Killings and Abductions in Nigeria 2019-2022](#), Appendix 1C, p.29 and Appendix 3C, p.35).

Muslims

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

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "In January, March, and May [2021], protesters marching for the release of Sheikh El Zakzaky, calling themselves the Free Zakzaky movement, clashed with security forces. The NGO Shia Rights Watch stated that government security forces opened fire on Free Zakzaky protestors on May 7."
- "In February [2021], Kano State authorities banned well known Muslim cleric Sheikh Abduljabbar Nasiru-Kabara from preaching. After he participated in a televised debate in July, Kano State authorities arrested him on charges of blasphemy."

Jewish community

According to the US State Department (IRFR 2021):

- "In July [2021], authorities detained for 20 days three visiting Israeli filmmakers making a documentary about Nigerian Jews in South East region on suspicion they were supporting the Indigenous People of Biafra, a group the government outlawed for its stated aims of seeking the separation of the South East region from the country, the leaders of which professed a connection to Judaism. Authorities released them without charge".

Future outlook

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

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

The overall threat for the Church in Nigeria - and for most of the country's population - is 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 would "continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping

all over Nigeria". He then added that, 'God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country'." (See above: *Persecution engines*.)

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

The [February 2023 report](#) of the newly established Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa has a slightly different approach in that it has tried to be comprehensive in its registration of incidents involving killings and abductions. It counted killings and abductions of civilians and their religious backgrounds, of the security forces and of 'Terror Groups'. ORFA states (pp. 6-7): "The report distinguishes between the religious background of the civilian victims because a variety of contradictory analyses exists concerning the causes of violence in Nigeria. Some analyses blame everything on a 'classical' herder-farmer conflict made worse by environmental degradation in the wider region. Other analyses see as the exclusive guiding theme the vision of Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani radical Islamic scholar who began an Islamic jihad in Gobir in 1804, and by 1808 had established the Sokoto Caliphate. He had vowed to enforce Islam through the power of the sword from the Sahara Desert in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the south. ORFA is not taking sides. The Observatory wants to let the data speak for itself".

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

If the current 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 and other sources of violence that accompany it. Such a scenario would not only be disastrous for the Church in Nigeria and for the country itself, but also for the entire region.

In 2021 some suggested that major changes might occur in Nigeria before (or around) the end of President Buhari's second term. One of them was the former Head of Naval Intelligence, Professor of Global Security Studies, Commodore Kunle Olawunmi. In a revealing interview with Channels Television he described the situation in Nigeria as a strategy of '[Talibanization](#)', in which state actors and tribal groups are also complicit (YouTube, 25 August 2021). At the time of writing of this dossier (April 2023) it has turned out that the APC (the party of outgoing President Buhari) with its Muslim-Muslim ticket won the elections (see above: *Drivers of persecution*). Although Commodore Kunle Olawunmi's fears did not materialize, the election results seem to hold little promise for change from the pathway laid out during the Presidency of Buhari. That is why many Christians were heavily disappointed by the 2023 election results.

External Links - Persecution Dynamics

- Drivers of persecution description: persecution eclipse - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Distinctive-elements-of-WWL-methodology.pdf>
- Drivers of persecution description: RLPB 678 - <https://rlprayerbulletin.blogspot.com/2023/01/rlpb-678-nigerian-elections-1-candidates.html>
- Block 2.10: Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution. (4.00 points): Leah Sharibu - <https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2020/december/nigeria-katsina-boys-freed-boko-haram-chibok-leah-sharibu.html>
- Block 3.4: Christians been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water). (3.50 points): grossly inadequate - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Nigeria-Assessment-of-Christian-situation-in-4-north-eastern-states-June-2017.pdf>
- Block 4.13: Christians have been accused of blasphemy or insulting the majority religion, either by state authorities or by pressure groups. (3.75 points): killing of Christian student - <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/nigeria-blasphemy-killing-mere-public-disturbance/>
- Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points): Vanguard, 19 June 2022 - <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/06/attack-on-churches-35-pastors-abducted-killed-in-17-months/>
- Block 5.11: Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons. (3.75 points): Leadership NG, June 2022 - <https://leadership.ng/editorial-kidnappers-taste-for-the-clergy/>
- Violence / Block 6 - commentary: February 2023 report - <https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Nigeria-Killings-and-Abduction-10-2019%E2%80%932021%E2%80%93final.pdf>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: Girls Not Brides, accessed 21 November 2022 - <https://atlas.girlsnotbrides.org/map/nigeria>
- Gender-specific religious persecution Female description: calls for a greater response - <https://dailytrust.com/orno-adamawa-yobe-recorded-5623-sexual-violence-in-four-years-report/>
- Persecution of other religious minorities: ORFA, Killings and Abductions in Nigeria 2019-2022 - <https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/230217-ORFA-Killings-and-Abductions-in-Nigeria-2019-2022.pdf>
- Future outlook: Nigeria's Silent Slaughter - <https://iconhelp.org/silent-slaughter/>
- Future outlook: February 2023 report - <https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/230217-ORFA-Killings-and-Abductions-in-Nigeria-2019-2022.pdf>
- Future outlook: Talibanization - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KyHowYHyAp8>

Further useful reports

A selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the new Research & Reports page of the website od.org. As in earlier years, they are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom) using the following links:

- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Nigeria>
- <https://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports#wwranalysisnigeria2013-2018>
- [ODA-February-2023-Round-up-Special-Nigeria-Focus.pdf \(opendoorsanalytical.org\)](https://opendoorsanalytical.org/ODA-February-2023-Round-up-Special-Nigeria-Focus.pdf)