
World Watch Research

Nigeria: Persecution Dynamics

January 2025



Open Doors

Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Contents

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50.....	2
World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78	4
Copyright, sources and definitions	5
Reporting period	6
Brief country details.....	6
Map of country	7
Dominant persecution engines and drivers.....	7
Brief description of the persecution situation.....	8
Summary of international obligations and rights violations.....	9
Specific examples of violations of rights in the reporting period	9
Specific examples of positive developments	12
Christian communities and how they are affected.....	12
Areas where Christians face most difficulties.....	12
Position on the World Watch List	14
Persecution engines.....	15
Drivers of persecution.....	17
The Persecution pattern	20
Pressure in the 5 spheres of life.....	21
Violence	26
5 Year trends.....	29
Gender-specific religious persecution / Female	31
Gender-specific religious persecution / Male	33
Persecution of other religious minorities	34
Trends Summary	35
Further useful reports.....	37
External Links	37

World Watch List 2025 – Top 50

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	14.4	98	96	98	96	94
2	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.7	11.1	94	93	92	91	92
3	Yemen	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.6	94	89	89	88	87
4	Libya	16.0	16.2	15.9	16.2	16.4	10.6	91	91	88	91	92
5	Sudan	14.1	14.2	15.5	14.9	15.3	16.1	90	87	83	79	79
6	Eritrea	14.6	14.9	15.5	15.9	15.9	12.2	89	89	89	88	88
7	Nigeria	13.5	13.9	14.6	14.9	14.5	16.7	88	88	88	87	85
8	Pakistan	13.6	13.9	15.0	15.0	12.9	16.7	87	87	86	87	88
9	Iran	15.0	14.6	13.5	15.9	16.5	10.9	86	86	86	85	86
10	Afghanistan	15.6	15.9	15.9	16.4	16.7	5.0	85	84	84	98	94
11	India	12.2	12.9	13.3	14.9	13.9	16.5	84	83	82	82	83
12	Saudi Arabia	15.2	15.3	14.8	15.8	16.6	3.3	81	81	80	81	78
13	Myanmar	12.6	11.1	13.5	14.1	12.9	16.5	81	79	80	79	74
14	Mali	11.1	10.1	14.7	13.0	15.2	15.6	80	79	76	70	67
15	China	13.2	10.1	12.8	14.6	16.1	11.1	78	78	77	76	74
16	Maldives	15.6	15.3	13.7	15.8	16.5	0.7	78	78	77	77	77
17	Iraq	14.2	14.4	14.3	14.8	13.9	6.1	78	79	76	78	82
18	Syria	13.5	14.4	13.9	14.4	14.3	7.0	78	81	80	78	81
19	Algeria	14.7	14.3	11.5	14.7	16.0	6.3	77	79	73	71	70
20	Burkina Faso	11.7	9.7	13.2	11.5	14.0	15.6	76	75	71	68	67
21	Morocco	13.2	13.8	11.6	12.9	14.3	8.3	74	71	69	69	67
22	Laos	11.8	10.7	13.5	14.1	13.9	9.8	74	75	68	69	71
23	Mauritania	14.6	14.2	13.8	14.2	14.2	2.8	74	72	72	70	71
24	Bangladesh	12.4	10.6	12.7	11.3	10.4	16.1	74	71	69	68	67
25	Uzbekistan	14.6	12.7	13.5	12.4	15.5	4.4	73	71	71	71	71
26	Cuba	13.2	8.5	13.9	13.3	15.1	9.1	73	73	70	66	62
27	CAR	10.3	8.6	13.9	9.6	14.0	15.6	72	70	70	68	66
28	Niger	9.4	9.6	14.5	7.7	14.6	15.7	72	70	70	68	62

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
29	Turkmenistan	14.3	12.3	13.6	13.9	15.3	1.5	71	70	70	69	70
30	Nicaragua	12.4	7.6	13.7	13.3	14.1	9.6	71	70	65	56	51
31	Mexico	11.7	9.0	12.5	11.8	11.0	14.6	71	68	67	65	64
32	Oman	14.5	14.1	10.9	13.8	14.1	3.0	70	69	65	66	63
33	Ethiopia	9.9	9.7	12.6	10.4	12.1	15.6	70	69	66	66	65
34	Tunisia	12.4	13.2	10.1	12.6	13.8	8.1	70	69	67	66	67
35	DRC	8.0	7.9	12.6	10.8	14.5	16.1	70	67	67	66	64
36	Bhutan	13.2	13.2	12.3	14.1	14.2	2.2	69	68	66	67	64
37	Mozambique	9.3	8.5	13.9	8.4	12.5	15.9	68	68	68	65	63
38	Kazakhstan	13.3	11.6	12.2	12.8	14.2	4.3	68	65	65	64	64
39	Tajikistan	14.1	12.7	12.7	13.2	13.7	1.9	68	66	66	65	66
40	Egypt	12.7	13.7	12.1	12.4	10.9	6.3	68	68	68	71	75
41	Qatar	14.2	14.2	10.5	13.2	14.4	0.7	67	67	68	74	67
42	Comoros	12.7	14.0	11.2	12.4	14.2	2.6	67	66	66	63	62
43	Cameroon	8.8	7.6	12.6	8.4	13.1	16.1	67	66	65	65	64
44	Vietnam	10.8	9.5	12.2	14.1	14.1	5.9	67	68	70	71	72
45	Turkey	13.0	11.7	11.7	13.2	11.5	5.4	67	64	66	65	69
46	Colombia	11.0	7.9	12.7	11.5	10.5	12.6	66	68	71	68	67
47	Kyrgyzstan	13.5	10.3	11.7	11.4	12.4	6.9	66	59	59	58	58
48	Brunei	14.8	14.8	10.8	10.8	14.0	0.6	66	66	65	64	64
49	Chad	11.0	8.2	10.2	9.9	10.3	15.9	65	61	58	55	53
50	Jordan	12.9	14.3	10.4	12.2	12.8	2.4	65	65	65	66	64

World Watch List 2025 – Ranks 51-78

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
51	Malaysia	12.8	13.7	11.7	12.4	11.2	3.0	65	64	66	63	63
52	Azerbaijan	13.3	10.2	9.6	12.2	13.7	5.6	65	60	59	60	56
53	Kenya	10.3	9.2	11.4	8.0	11.5	13.9	64	63	64	63	62
54	Nepal	12.2	10.6	9.5	12.6	12.3	5.9	63	62	61	64	66
55	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	15.4	63	62	63	61	58
56	Russian Federation	12.7	7.9	10.7	13.1	14.1	4.4	63	58	57	56	57
57	Djibouti	12.3	12.6	12.7	10.1	12.1	1.7	61	61	60	59	56
58	Kuwait	13.1	13.6	9.4	12.0	12.2	0.9	61	61	64	64	63
59	Indonesia	10.9	11.9	10.9	11.6	10.2	5.7	61	66	68	68	63
60	UAE	13.3	13.4	9.5	11.3	12.8	0.6	61	61	62	62	62
61	Sri Lanka	12.7	8.7	11.5	11.5	8.5	7.6	60	60	57	63	62
62	Palestinian Territories	13.1	13.3	10.3	10.7	12.1	0.2	60	60	60	59	58
63	Burundi	7.6	7.8	9.4	9.8	9.7	14.6	59	57	55	52	48
64	Rwanda	9.4	7.7	9.0	10.4	12.1	9.4	58	58	57	50	42
65	Honduras	7.9	4.7	11.7	7.3	9.9	13.1	55	55	53	48	46
66	Togo	9.2	6.7	10.4	7.1	11.5	9.3	54	52	49	44	43
67	Bahrain	12.0	13.2	8.6	11.3	8.5	0.6	54	55	55	57	56
68	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	8.3	10.5	8.9	54	52	48	43	47
69	Ukraine	6.8	5.0	7.8	12.5	13.5	7.2	53	44	37	37	34
70	Angola	6.8	6.7	8.1	11.5	11.4	8.3	53	52	52	51	46
71	Venezuela	6.3	4.4	11.1	10.0	10.8	9.6	52	53	56	51	39
72	Uganda	8.1	5.0	7.4	6.7	8.8	16.1	52	52	51	48	47
73	Ivory Coast	12.0	6.5	8.7	5.9	8.0	9.6	51	44	44	42	42
74	Lebanon	11.5	10.1	7.0	6.2	6.7	7.2	49	48	40	35	34
75	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.9	8.8	8.9	4.4	48	47	44	44	43
76	South Sudan	5.7	4.4	7.0	6.3	8.1	15.6	47	46	46	43	43

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2025	Total Score WWL 2024	Total Score WWL 2023	Total Score WWL 2022	Total Score WWL 2021
77	Belarus	9.9	3.7	5.0	10.8	14.1	3.1	47	46	43	33	30
78	Philippines	9.2	6.6	6.6	6.1	5.7	8.5	43	40	32	34	26

Copyright, sources and definitions

World Watch Research has divided up the previously named Full Country Dossier into two separate documents:

- [Background country information](#) (published annually in summer)
- [Persecution dynamics](#) (published annually in January).

These documents are the property of World Watch Research (WWR), the research department of Open Doors International. They include data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and 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 end of each document under the heading “External links”. These documents may be used and distributed free of charge, but please always acknowledge the source as: © Open Doors International.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”. This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology can be found on the research pages of the Open Doors website: <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Reporting period

The WWL 2025 reporting period was 1 October 2023 - 30 September 2024.

Brief country details

Nigeria:

Population (UN estimate for 2024)

229,152,000

Nigeria: Religious context	Number of adherents	%
Christians	106,608,000	46.5
Muslim	105,322,000	46.0
Hindu	45,000	0.0
Buddhist	12,600	0.0
Ethnic religionist	16,417,000	7.2
Jewish	1,200	0.0
Bahai	57,600	0.0
Atheist	65,500	0.0
Agnostic	592,000	0.3
Other	31,700	0.0
<i>OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.</i>		

Zurlo G A and Johnson T M, eds., World Christian Database, Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed May 2024

Map of country



Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

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

Brief description of the persecution situation

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

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

During the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari (2015 - 2023), violence from various Islamic groups increased. In addition to what already was happening, the government has been unable to prevent the increase of brutal acts of violence of which many Nigerians are victims, but most particularly Christians - with impunity. Most of this violence is in the North, in the form of attacks by Fulani militants and armed 'bandits', Boko Haram and Boko Haram split-off Islamic State in West Africa Province - ISWAP, 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 farmland; 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 or even the threat of being killed.

The new president, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, carried out a major reshuffle in the administration, which provided a better representative balance of the two faiths in leadership positions than was in place under his predecessor Muhammadu Buhari. The hope was that this would cause a positive shift towards acknowledging the extent of the human rights violations being perpetrated against Christians, and lead to more effective intervention by security forces to protect Christians. However, this did not happen to a tangible extent in the WWL 2025 reporting period.

Particularly worrying are two new trends:

- 1) The escalation of activities in the North-West by the Lakurawa [jihadist group](#) (Truth Nigeria, 8 November 2024), armed with advanced weaponry and a [radical Islamic agenda](#) (The Conversation, 17 November 2024). Lakurawa is affiliated with the expansionist al-Qaeda insurgency *Jama'at Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin* originating in Mali and referred to as JNIM. According to a Nigerian researcher, Lakurawa has integrated 'bandit' kingpins from the North-West.
- 2) Reports have surfaced about the emergence of a [unified ISWAP-Boko Haram front](#) (Truth Nigeria, 26 November 2024). According to a Nigerian security analyst, it seems to confirm an ongoing alliance between jihadist groups in the Sahel.

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

Examples of killings and abductions in different states. Focus is on incidents with Christian victims. In cases where there is no reference provided, the data are primary data from The Para-Mallam Peace Foundation (TPMPF). In most cases, such incidents did not make it to the news. In cases where the references mention "people" or "civilians" as victims, without specifying the religious background of the victims, TPMPF provided those details.

ATTACKS

- **Christmas 2023:** Horrific attacks on sleeping villages in Nigeria's Plateau State starting on 23 December were mounted by more than 3,000 Islamic militants fanning out to 38 villages for simultaneous attacks or marching from village to village. Armed groups shouting "Allahu Akbar [God is great]" according to witnesses raided villages for eight days, killing at minimum 295 people, as documented by a local monitoring group known as Plateau Civil Society Organizations Forum. TruthNigeria confidently reports that at least 3,000 militants, including mercenaries from Niger Republic, Chad and Cameroon combined with Fulani residents in Plateau to carry out an anti-Christian pogrom. The thousands of Nigerian soldiers who manned hundreds of checkpoints in Plateau were similarly outmatched. Amnesty International reported that Nigerian military did not respond to the raids for the first 48 hours. TruthNigeria interviewed survivors who heard the terrorists speak the Fulani dialect. Many of them were familiar to the victims who had lived and done business with them for years. (Source: [Truth Nigeria, 2 January 2024](#))

- **29 October 2023:** 20 decomposing dead bodies and skeletons were discovered by security operatives during a raid in a forest around the Lokpanta cattle market in Umunneochi axis, Umunneochi local government area (LGA), Abia state. A further 50 dead bodies were found elsewhere around the market. Ransom payments to suspected kidnappers were traced to the local market. All victims were Christians. (Source: [BBC News, 30 October 2023](#))
- **24 January 2024:** Fulani ethnic militias (FEM) attacked Kwahaslalek village in Mangu LGA, Plateau state killing 24 Christians, mostly women and children. (Source : [Al-Jazeera, 25 January 2024](#))
- **29 January 2024:** At about 7:30am, 13 farmers were killed from an IED suspected to have been planted by militants on Pulka-Firgi Road in the Gwoza LGA, Borno state. An 18-seater vehicle conveying the victims to their farms ran over the IED. 6 farmers and the driver were confirmed dead, seven others were also severely injured. 6 other farmers died in the hospital. All but two were Christians. (Source : [ChannelsTV, 29 January 2024](#))
- **8 August 2024:** FEM attacked Ayati community in Ukum LGA, Benue state. 74 Christians were killed and many houses were destroyed. The villagers were forced to leave their communities. (Source: [AllAfrica, 19 August 2024](#))

ABDUCTIONS

- **Easter 2024:** On the evening of Easter Sunday in April 2024, villages in southern Kaduna state were attacked in an area heavy with military installations. Witnesses told the news media they saw no government effort to protect the victims. At least 35 persons, all Christians, were abducted. (Source: [TruthNigeria, 2 April 2024](#))
- **17 January 2024:** Fulani militants abducted 67 people from Kajuru Station in Kajuru LGA, Kaduna state. 59 of the victims were Christians.
- **29 February 2024:** Fulani militants abducted 30 residents from Gonin Gora, a Christian community in Chikun LGA, Kaduna state.
- **17 March 2024:** Fulani militants abducted 87 people during an attack on Tantatu communication in Kajuru LGA, Kaduna state. 67 of the victims were Christians.
- **31 October 2023:** Fulani militants abducted 25 people, all Christians, from Ungwan Baka in Kachia LGA, Kaduna state.
- **13 December 2023:** At Least 10 passengers journeying along Ette-Umuopu Enugu-Ezike Road in the Igbo Eze North LGA, Enugu state were abducted. The vehicle was on its way to Enugu from Abuja when the incident occurred. Eight of the victims were Christians while two were Muslims. (Source: [Tori NG, 15 December 2023](#))
- **29 January 2024:** 14 school children with a headteacher and a driver were kidnapped in Ekiti state. The victims were students and staff of a nursery/primary school in Emure. The victims were kidnapped after their school bus was intercepted in Eporo Ekiti in the Emure LGA. All of the abductees were Christians. (Source: [Punch NG, 30 January 2024](#))

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

congregations, as Christians will come together to try to free a pastor. And it is resulting in the flight of Christian communities."

Data on many more such attacks can be found on the website of the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) which published their report "[Countering the myth of religious indifference in Nigerian terror \(10/2019 – 9/2023\)](#)" on 29 August 2024. The report provides an overview of the violence in the period mentioned.

FORCED DISPLACEMENT

Attacks on Christian communities not only mean people killed or abducted or otherwise severely mistreated. Such attacks often also mean loss of livelihood and forced displacement, for example:

- Many communities in Ukum LGA of Benue state have been displaced and the residents have not been able to return till date. A Nigeria researcher stated, "I interviewed some victims in communities in Ukum Benue state in May 2024 and they told me that they fled their communities after they were attacked and the attackers lurked around the bushes preventing them from attempting to return. That has always been the story in communities far away from major roads across the Middle Belt. Because of the locations of such communities, the residents are left to their fates whenever they come under attack."
- Benue state is a Christian-majority state in the North-Central. It has a population of 6,491,000 people, with 75% Christians, 15% Ethnic religionists and 10% Muslims 10%. (Source: WCD, accessed May 2024) Truth Nigeria (reporting on 10 October 2024) claims that in Benue state [non-indigenous Fulani ethnic militias](#) (FEM) occupy a large percentage of LGAs. If residents try to return to their homes, they find not much is left to return to. Much infrastructure is destroyed, including their own houses. The County Chairman of Guma and Chairman, Association of All Local Governments (Counties) of Nigeria (ALGON), revealed the level of devastation caused by FEM in an interview with reporters in Makurdi. "When I assumed office 3 months ago, 90 percent of the infrastructures, ranging from schools, hospitals to markets were completely destroyed by Fulani terrorists. Only 5 schools were still standing and functional in the entire County." He added: "Many of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are now returning to their ancestral homes after so many years in IDPs Camps but have no shelters to lay their heads as their houses were either [destroyed or burnt down](#) completely." (Source: Truth Nigeria, 2 January 2025)
- In Plateau state, there are communities in Riyom LGAs that have not only been displaced but [renamed and occupied](#) by Fulani militants. (Source: This day live, 2 June 2024)
- When communities are attacked - apparently because there is no security provided by the government - survivors naturally flee and cannot return in most cases, since it would be unsafe for them to do so.

The Open Doors [Arise Africa campaign](#) investigated the consequences of the attacks on Christian communities in North-Central and North-East Nigeria. Their report "[No Road Home](#)" presents their research findings (Open Doors, 1 September 2024).

According to the "[GRID 2024](#)" report published by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), at the end of 2023 the total number of IDPs (caused by conflict and violence) in Nigeria was 3,340,000 people. This number does not include those who left the country as refugees.

Specific examples of positive developments

New presidency

In February 2023, Bola Tinubu was elected as the new President of Nigeria. His election was controversial because he ran on a Muslim-Muslim ticket for the APC, which was unprecedented in Nigeria's recent history. Nevertheless, there were signs that President Tinubu might want to ease the growing polarization in the country between its Christian and Muslim populations. President Tinubu made a major reshuffle in various posts to establish a better balance between Muslim and Christian critical office holders. In 2024 he followed that up by another such reshuffle. The hope was that this would lead to more effective intervention by security forces on behalf of Christians and encourage a positive shift in recognition of religious freedom violations against Christians by the government. Analysis of the WWL 2025 reporting period has shown that these hopes were largely in vain.

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'. There is sometimes pressure on converts from Islam to Christianity in other parts of the country too but this is less frequent and with 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.

Areas where Christians face most difficulties

The situation has become very problematic for all civilians, particularly Christians. Nigeria has six geopolitical 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. Each zone has its own profile of hostilities against Christians (and others).

Violent attacks in the northern geopolitical zones

Violence in the North-East was mainly perpetrated by Boko Haram and ISWAP. In the North-West there were multiple groups of armed 'bandits' operating. In the North-Central, including Kaduna state, there were attacks by Fulani militants. However, the [areas of operation](#) of Fulani militants and armed 'bandit' groups have merged into each other and partly overlapped. (Source: ORFA report, 29 August 2024) A Nigerian analyst described the situation this way: "North-West, North-Central and North-East are the areas in Nigeria where Christians are severely persecuted using all forms of violence by different types of jihadist groups under different guise working for the full establishment of an Islamic state." He also sees increasing violence in southern Nigeria and points to the possibility of "a strategic expansion of persecution of Christians across the entire country in the near future."

In the 12 Sharia states (Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara) and partly in the 7 remaining northern states (Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Taraba) much of the violations of basic rights of Christians are related to pressure in the five spheres of life. (For more information, see below: *Pressure in the five spheres of life*.) Particularly worrying are two new trends: Increased operations by the Lakurawa jihadist group and a new unified ISWAP-Boko Haram front - see above: *Brief description of the persecution situation*.

A very specific form of violence against Christians are the raids on often small Christian communities in the rural areas of various, mostly northern 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.

Violent attacks are already occurring in the southern geopolitical zones

Violence and land grabbing are no longer limited to the three northern geopolitical zones, but has already extended into the three southern geopolitical zones. Meanwhile, the circles of influence of the different groups perpetrating violence have been increasingly overlapping, and it is sometimes difficult to distinguish which violent group is responsible for which acts and what the specific identity of a certain group is.

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, emphasizing 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.

On 15 January 2025, Truth Nigeria reported: "A growing sense of unease is gripping Southwest Nigeria as reports emerge of terrorists such as Lakurawa, Ansaru and Fulani Ethnic Militia fleeing military operations in the Northwest and [seeking refuge](#) in the region’s forests."

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

Further research revealed that the invasion and permanent occupation of communities, villages and locations must be understood here differently than in the northern context. It seems the population was not directly driven away from their villages but in many cases found that their distant forests and farmlands had been taken over by armed Fulani herdsmen (and Shuwa Arabs). More recently, the situation in south-eastern areas has improved.

Position on the World Watch List

Nigeria: World Watch List	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2025	88	7
WWL 2024	88	6
WWL 2023	88	6
WWL 2022	87	7
WWL 2021	85	9

Both pressure and violence scores (the latter at the maximum level possible) have remained largely unchanged in the WWL 2025 reporting period. Christians and their communities continue to be attacked in many parts of the country. In 2023, the new president Bola Ahmed Tinubu had carried out a major reshuffle, which provided a better representative balance of the two faiths in leadership positions than was in place under his predecessor Muhammadu Buhari. The hope was that this would cause a positive shift towards acknowledging the extent of the human rights violations being perpetrated against Christians, and lead to more effective intervention by security forces to protect Christians. However, this did not happen to a tangible extent in the WWL 2025 reporting period.

Persecution engines

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

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

The persecution situation in Nigeria was still heavily influenced by the legacy of former President Buhari, in the WWL 2025 reporting period. It is not clear why the current President Tinubu has not yet been able to turn the tide for his Christian citizens.

The persecution situation in Nigeria is a blend of 5 very strong Persecution engines:

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

According to Dr Funom Makama: “In 2001 at an Islamic seminar in Kaduna, Buhari was given an opportunity to choose between Nigeria’s secularism and fundamentalist Islam, this is what he said; 'I will continue to show openly and inside me the total commitment to the Sharia movement that is sweeping all over Nigeria'. He then added that 'God willing, we will not stop the agitation for the total implementation of the Sharia in the country'." (Source: Makama F, A compilation of Online Publications and Press Releases as Proofs of the Killings of Christians in Nigeria, 2020, p.5.)

The guiding principle behind this potentially explosive blend of Persecution engines has been 'Islamization at all costs', interwoven with an agenda for ethnic dominion by Fulani ethnic group leaders. This ethno-religious agenda has led to heavy persecution of Christians, and increasingly of Hausa Muslims too. It is difficult to know if there was such a thing as a policy (or set of policies) designed for it, or that it was more a case of just how things were going. The above quote from former President Buhari suggests it was not so much about policies but more about 'agitation', in other words,

about creating or allowing for chaos or impunity to prevail. This characteristic has not yet improved during President's Tinubu's presidency.

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 the Ethno-religionists.

In Nigeria, the oppressive Islamization process has been 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. This creates the risk of ethnic conflict. A Nigerian analyst thinks that other ethnic groups (outside this coalition) are watching carefully. If the Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri go too far, it might just lead to war. He has expressed his fear that the country might move in this direction if things continue as they are, since many are feeling excluded.

Important to note is that there has been increasing tension between the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups. Hostilities have emerged in particular in the North-West. According to a Nigerian analyst: "Hausa and Fulani feuds are growing by the day; it may likely snowball into full blown war in the near future due to the gradual understanding of age-long domination by Fulanis over Hausas."

In northern Nigeria violence committed in the name of Islam by Boko Haram and ISWAP against civilians, and especially against Christians, has been rampant. The same applies for violence committed by Fulani militants and the so-called armed 'bandits'. As mentioned above, the circles of influence of these different groups are now increasingly overlapping, including their agendas, and this is a threatening development not only for the northern states but also the southern states. Clear examples of land-grabbing and related violence by armed Fulani herdsman, can already be seen in several southern states.

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

Drivers of persecution

Nigeria: Drivers of Persecution	IO	RN	ERH	CO	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG	MEDIUM	-	-	-	VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Very strong	Very strong	Strong	-	-	-	-	Very strong	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very strong	-	Very strong	Weak	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong	Very strong	Strong	-	-	-	-	Medium	Medium
Religious leaders of other churches	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Violent religious groups	Very strong	-	Very strong	-	-	-	-	Strong	Very strong
Ideological pressure groups	Very strong	-	Strong	-	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong	-	Weak	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong	-	Weak	Weak	-	-	-	-	-
Political parties	Strong	Strong	-	-	-	-	-	Strong	Strong
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	Medium	-	Medium	-	-	-	-	Medium	Medium
Organized crime cartels or networks	Very 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 Ethno-religious hostility, Islamic oppression, Religious nationalism, Dictatorial paranoia, Organized corruption and crime

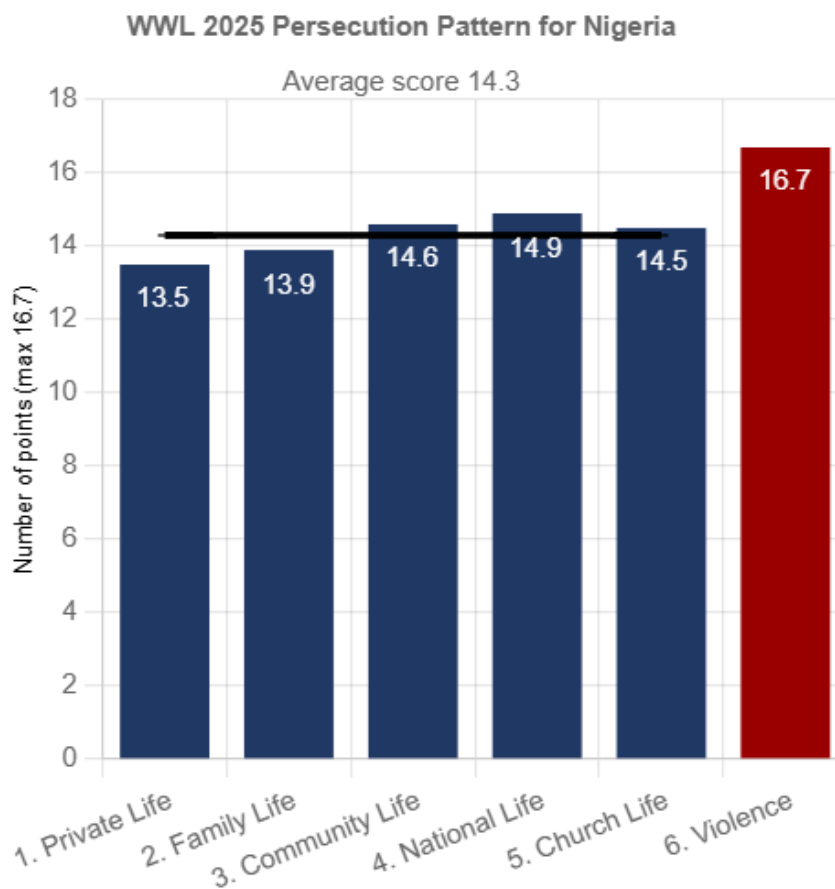
- **Government officials (Very strong to Strong):** It would appear that former President Muhammadu Buhari used his position to appoint Muslims to key positions in the country, and to allow a culture of impunity that makes it possible for violations against Christians to go largely unnoticed. Current President Tinubu has not yet been able to turn the tide. The governments (and non-state actors) of the 12 Sharia states were already on the same track, but they may thus feel encouraged to further Islamize their states with oppressive policies instead of guaranteeing the elementary rights of their Christian citizens (freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of expression). Governments (and non-state actors) in other states might also feel encouraged, or sometimes forced, to promote (further) Islamization of their states, even in the South: In particular, by not being able to protect their citizens against violence from Islamic militants, given that the security apparatus is not under their command. Some state governments are trying to protect their whole citizenry, but with limited resources.
- **Ethnic group leaders (Very strong [to Weak]):** Ethnic group leaders as drivers of persecution and discrimination have two dimensions: One dimension concerns whether (and how) they persecute group members who convert to Christianity from the generally held religion (i.e. from African Traditional Religion/ATR or Islam). The other dimension concerns whether (and how) they commit acts of persecution and discrimination between ethnic groups with different religions. In the past, when ATR was dominant, rights violations of Christian converts by adherents of ATR was common, but violations in this context have gradually reduced and come now primarily from the Muslim Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri ethnic groups. Unlike the south of Nigeria which has ethnic tribal chiefs, most northern tribes have religious rulers or emirs instead. Many of them subscribe to the agenda of furthering the oppressive Islamization policies of their ethnic groups and beyond.
- **Non-Christian religious leaders (Very Strong [to Medium]):** Many Muslim religious leaders have been sources of basic rights violations against Christians at the level of religious ideology, intolerant messaging and incitement.
- **Violent religious groups (Very strong to Strong):** There are various violent groups but in the context of WWL analysis the most prominent ones are the Fulani militants and armed 'bandits', Boko Haram and ISWAP. According to the [Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa](#) (ORFA report, August 2024), the number of Christians killed by Armed Fulani Herdsmen over the reporting period Oct 2019 - Sep 2013 was almost 7 times as much as those killed by Boko Haram and ISWAP combined. The category 'Other Terrorist Groups' (most of whom are armed 'bandits') killed more than 3.5 times as many Christians as Boko Haram and ISWAP combined. So, the categories Armed Fulani Herdsmen and armed 'bandits' combined killed more than 10 times as many Christians as the total of Christians killed by Boko Haram and ISWAP.
- **Ideological pressure groups (Very strong to Strong):** The Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) deserves a special mention here: Not all Fulani herdsmen are violent militants and some even feel victimized because they are Fulani although they have not been involved in violent attacks. However, the activities of MACBAN have become highly politicized in recent times because of links to powerful patrons, including former President Buhari and the Sultan of Sokoto. MACBAN gives protection to Fulani militants and justification for their aggression. The former president and the Sultan of Sokoto have continually shown tacit support

for the expansionist agenda of the Fulani militants. MACBAN claims to be a socio-cultural group, representing the interest of cattle rearers all over Nigeria, but essentially, they are very focused on ethnicity in their composition and outlook. It is important to note that many of the Fulani herdsmen are mere fronts for influential people who actually own the cattle. There are also many Fulani Christians and non-Fulanis who own plenty of cows in Nigeria today. MACBAN does not treat them as bona fide members. MACBAN seeks to defend the course which Fulani Muslims are taking, including justifying the Fulani Ethnic Militia's violence against farmers. Fulani settlers are diverse. They are not all linked to Fulani herdsmen beyond sharing ethnic and religious identity. Many Fulani settlers who are Muslim are known to work with their Hausa Muslim counterparts to suppress Christians politically, socially and economically within their domains.

- **Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs (Strong [to Weak]):** Apart from the hostility from state and organized non-state actors, another source of persecution and intolerance is the 'street violence' where Muslims in the local community riot and attack Christians for flimsy reasons or false accusations of blasphemy in northern Nigeria. This occurs mostly in the context of the Persecution engine *Islamic oppression*. A Muslim southerner who grew up in the North once said that northern Muslims would borrow money from her and promise to repay her during the next riot. This anecdotal evidence shows that these attacks are not always spontaneous but sometimes premeditated as a means of looting the 'infidels'. Christians have been losing property, churches and lives in the recurring violence for decades.
- **One's own (extended) family (Strong [to Weak]):** In the context of conversion from Islam to Christianity, one's own family (or extended family) is the primary threat. They are often the first to know, and depending on their standing in the community, may be the first to want to protect their family honor. This is especially the case in the northern states (including the Muslim majority part of the North-Central zone) where Islam has become an all-embracing attribute of identity, or where the Islamic religious identity has become politicized.
- **Political parties (Strong):** The two main political parties in Nigeria are divided along religious lines. These religious divisions are based not so much on ideology as on religious sentiment. The People's 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 (Very strong to Strong):** Drivers of the Persecution engine *Organized corruption and crime* can be government officials at various levels, together with other leading people from different sectors of society. Another category are criminal groups, which, in the context of Nigeria, often partly overlap with religious-ideological groups. They are not always directly responsible for committing violence against Christians because of their faith; their responsibility is also indirect where, for instance, they contribute to an escalation of 'agitation' or chaos that leads to '[persecution eclipse](#)', thus adding to the push for further oppressive Islamization of the country (WWR, WWL - Discussion of key themes, October 2024, p.14).

- **Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies (Strong):** Though covertly and more softly, many embassies are involved in deeply rooted discrimination against Christians in Nigeria. The government is aware of this but is avoiding the issue because these embassies are promoting Islam: Significant levels of funding and aid come from Arab countries which act as channels for empowering the Muslim population. This includes the building of mostly Islamic schools and hospitals with limited access for Christians. Rural Christians are particularly in need of healthcare, especially in northern Nigeria. The authorities make use of the aid and facilities supplied to entice Christians to leave their faith in order to gain access.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2025 persecution pattern for Nigeria shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nigeria is extremely high at a level of 14.3 points.
- Except for *Private life*, all other *spheres of life* scored 13.9 points or more out of the maximum of 16.7, thus recording extreme levels of pressure.
- The score for violence is the maximum possible (16.7 points). Over the last years (WWL 2015 - WWL 2025), 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 2025 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://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-documentation/>.

Pressure in Block 1 / Private sphere

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

In many states it is highly risky to conduct acts of worship for fear of being attacked by a violent Islamic group. Many rural churches have had all forms of Christian worship completely stopped. The levels of fear among Christian communities, in particular in these rural areas, are high, so churches have stopped their activities until the time when the security situation improves. So, for Christians to meet for any church activity it is risky and dangerous; anytime they meet they become vulnerable and exposed to the elements that seek to do them harm. This also applies for Christians in IDP situations, where church-related activities make them very visible.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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 oppressive Islamization in the country makes this situation worse. But there is more to consider: Even non-converts can be in danger for the simple fact of being recognized as Christians, for

instance at roadblocks, at school or in their villages. Many Christians in the North live in IDP situations where they sometimes also have to keep a low profile. This is especially true for Christian girls and women. All this makes it difficult to simply be a Christian - not only in the North, but also to a lesser degree in the South.

Pressure in Block 2 / Family sphere

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

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. The violence committed by violent Islamic militants has caused many Christians to be separated from their loved ones. Many have been forced to leave their families either in an IDP camp or other safe location, and then to go to other places to find jobs to support their families. Or they remain in the more dangerous regions for the same reason. Parents and children are also separated from each other through abduction. This also happens in a non-militant Islamic context in the North, particularly the abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Christian girls. There are even cases of Christian girls who have been abducted from the South and married off in the North.

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

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. 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.

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

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

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

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

Christian identity of their children to avoid persecution. Many parents have to raise their children in IDP situations, which also makes it difficult for Christian parents to train their children in Christian faith and values.

Pressure in Block 3 / Community sphere

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

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

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

According to a Nigerian analyst:

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

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

Block 3.4: Christians 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 armed Fulani herdsmen or 'bandits' in the context of Islamic militancy.

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

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

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

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

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

Pressure in Block 5 / Church sphere

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

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

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

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

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

Most of this happens in the North, although increasingly also in the South. Christian leaders are, without doubt, a particular target for harassment and kidnapping. For instance, 39 Roman Catholic priests were reported abducted and murdered in 2022 ([The Tablet, 30 October 2023](#)), and 23 were kidnapped in 2023 ([ACN International, 13 November 2023](#)). Harassment has, however, often taken on less serious 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.

Non-Catholics also experienced abduction. As reported by Truth Nigeria on 29 June 2024, Boko Haram released [disturbing videos](#) of Pastor Paul Musa and his wife, calling for around US\$40,000 to save their lives. In March 2024, Imam Idris Tenshi openly stated that Nigeria's First Lady should be killed because "she is a leader amongst the unbelievers". First Lady Remi Tinubu serves as a Pentecostal pastor ([Christian Daily, 5 March 2024](#)). Such public statements go some way to explaining the large numbers of Christian leaders being abducted.

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

Presently in all the 12 Sharia States, no new churches have been registered, in all these states land is not sold for new churches and even when churches go through the back door to get land they are attacked and the development and registration of the churches are totally hindered and threatened by mob attack from local Muslims. Some of the most notorious states include Zamfara, Sokoto, Kano, Kebbi, and Katsina.

In the Sharia states, churches and brothels have equal value, both will never be allowed to operate in some sections of town. Many Christians have to convert their residence to churches and risk the government pulling down such buildings, if the authorities notice that it is being used for Christian activities. Even within federal schools and state institutions in the North, the building of chapels is blocked; even though Christian students have a constitutional provision for a place of worship on campus, these rights are denied by the Muslim state. An example is given by Truth Nigeria for [university campuses in Katsina and Kaduna](#) (Truth Nigeria, 3 April 2024).

Violence

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

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

Possible reasons for this may be:

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

- *In some cultural settings, if your loved one is killed, you might be under the obligation to take revenge. Christians not wishing to do that, may decide to keep quiet about it.*

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

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

3. The use of symbolic numbers:

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

Nigeria: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.1 How many Christians have been killed for faith-related reasons (including state sanctioned executions)?	3,100	4,118
6.2 How many churches or public Christian properties (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	100 *	750
6.3 How many Christians have been detained for faith-related reasons?	31	10 *
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)?	2,830	3,300
6.6 How many Christians have been raped or otherwise sexually harassed for faith-related reasons?	1,000 *	1,000 *

(table continues below)

Nigeria: Violence scores per Block 6 question in questionnaire	WWL 2025	WWL 2024
6.7 How many cases have there been of forced marriages of Christians to non-Christians?	65	10 *
6.8 How many Christians have been otherwise physically or mentally abused for faith-related reasons (including beatings and death threats)?	10,000 *	10,000 *
6.9 How many houses of Christians or other property (excluding shops) have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	10,000 *	10,000 *
6.10 How many shops or businesses of Christians have been attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons?	1,000 *	1,000 *
6.11 How many Christians have been forced to leave their homes or go into hiding in-country for faith-related reasons?	100,000 *	100,000 *
6.12 How many Christians have been forced to leave the country for faith-related reasons?	1,000 *	1,000 *

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

As the [August 2024 report](#) by the Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) clearly shows in the Executive Summary, 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 very prominent. Some women and girls are abducted for sexual slavery or forced marriage. Others 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.

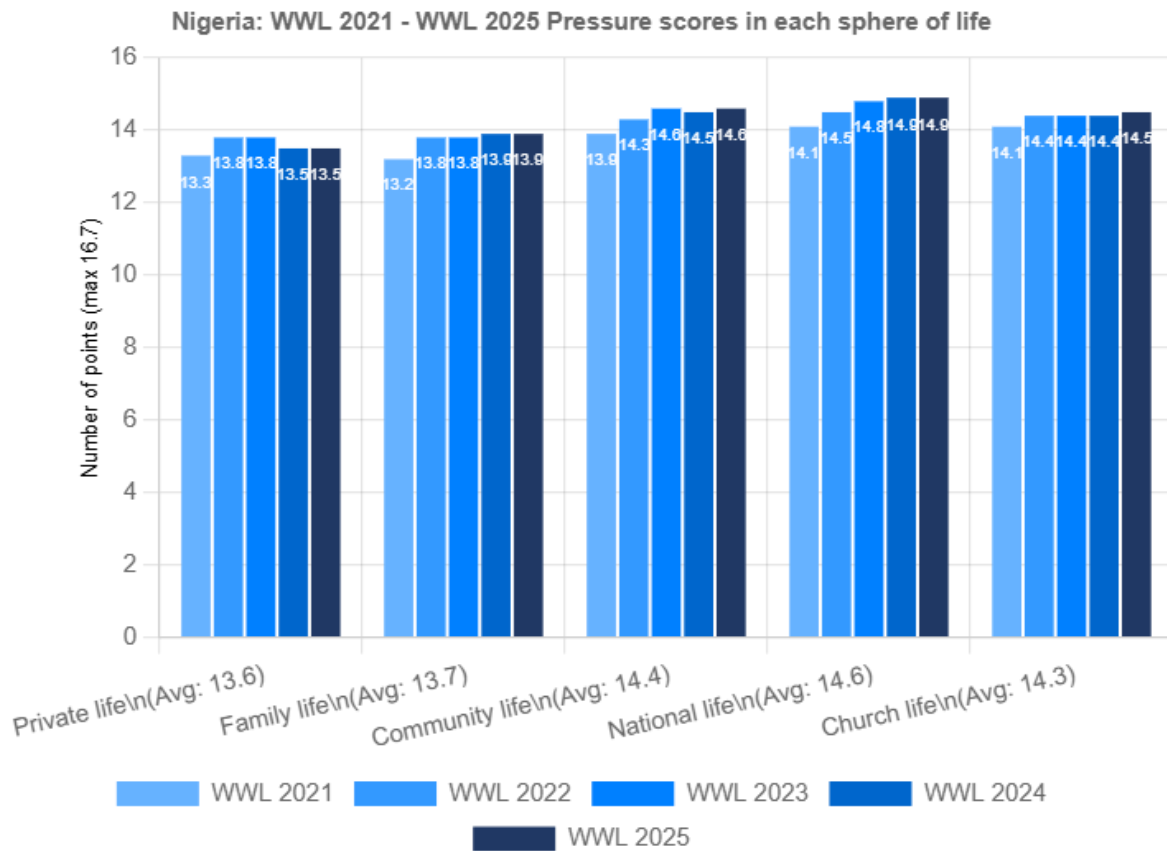
5 Year trends: Average pressure

Nigeria: WWL 2021 - WWL 2025	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2025	14.3
2024	14.2
2023	14.3
2022	14.2
2021	13.7

Prior to the reporting periods listed above, the average pressure on Christians in Nigeria had been increasing. For instance: the average pressure for WWL 2014 was 11.0 points; for WWL 2015: 12.2 points; for WWL 2016: 12.3 points; for WWL 2017: 12.3 points; for WWL 2018: 12.1 points; for WWL 2019: 12.7 points; for WWL 2020: 12.7. Since WWL 2022, average pressure is stable at an extreme level within the range of 14.2 - 14.3 points.

Before former President Buhari came to power in 2015, insecurity in Nigeria had already been increasing at a rapid rate. Yet the ‘agitation’ occurring during the former Buhari administration caused further deterioration in the country's situation for all Nigerians and especially for Christians. The current Tinubu administration has not been able to improve the situation during the WWL 2025 reporting period.

5 Year trends: Pressure in each sphere of life



There has been a limited increase in the scores for pressure in most of the different spheres of life over the last five WWL reporting periods. However, the averages for all spheres of life are remarkably high for a country such as Nigeria with a large Christian population. This pattern reflects the restrictions against Christians under a gradual process of Islamization which took place under Buhari's former presidency, and still continued under Tinubu's current presidency. In situations of high levels of jihadist activity, combined with almost total impunity, non-violent forms of hostility against Christians (and others) rise too.

5 Year trends: Violence against Christians

The score for violence has remained at maximum level for the past five reporting periods. In previous reporting periods, the score for violence was: In WWL 2014, 15.6 points; in WWL 2015, 16.7 points; in WWL 2016, 16.7 points; in WWL 2017, 16.1 points; in WWL 2018, 16.5 points; in WWL 2019, 16.7 points; in WWL 2020, 16.7 points.

Nine times over the last 12 WWL reporting periods, the score for violence in Nigeria has reached the maximum score of 16.7 points. Behind these scores a world of suffering is hidden. Indeed, the number of Christians killed in Nigeria has been the bulk of the global totals for Christians killed for many years. This is not only linked to the size of the Church - the number of Christians even in the north of Nigeria is quite large - but above all to the dynamics of unceasing jihadist violence in the country.



Gender-specific religious persecution / Female

<p>Nigeria</p> <p>Female Pressure Points</p> <p>Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abduction Denied custody of children Discrimination/harassment via education Economic harassment via business/job/work access Enforced religious dress code Forced marriage Forced to flee town/country Targeted Seduction Trafficking Violence – death Violence – physical Violence – psychological Violence – sexual Violence – Verbal

In the North of Nigeria, and increasingly in the South, the situation of Christian women and girls continues to be dire. Raids by Fulani militants and armed ‘bandits’, Boko Haram and ISWAP, have

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

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

The fear that something will happen with their Christian daughters causes many Christian parents to push for early marriage as a kind of protection. This, alongside laws permitting under-age marriage in some states, contributes to the high early marriage rate for girls ([Girls Not Brides Nigeria, 30 May 2024](#)). 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.

Gender-specific religious persecution / Male

Nigeria Male Pressure Points Most frequently recorded PPs: WWL 2019 - WWL 2024

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

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

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

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

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

Persecution of other religious minorities

Adherents of ATR

Adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR) are known to face attacks and abductions from militant groups.

Muslim community

Muslims who are not part of a militant group attacking communities, are also vulnerable to attacks. Especially in north-western states, many Hausa Muslims have been killed and/or abducted by the same groups that killed and/or abducted Christians, and also had to flee their villages.

The Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) reports that in the Oct 2019 – Sep 2023 reporting period [many Muslims were killed or abducted](#) too. Most of them were Hausa Muslims.

- Muslims were killed by the same groups that killed Christians, although with different percentages. 55% of the Christians killed were killed by Armed Fulani Herdsmen (9,153); 29% by Other Terrorist Groups (4,895). Boko Haram and ISWAP combined stood for 8% of the Christians killed (1,268). For Muslims it was the opposite: 24% of the Muslims killed were killed by Armed Fulani Herdsmen (1,473); 53% by Other Terrorist Groups (3,334). Boko Haram and ISWAP combined stood for 12% of the Muslims killed (770).
- Muslims were abducted by the same groups that abducted Christians, but with different percentages. 60% of Christians abducted were kidnapped by Other Terrorist Groups (6,675) and 35% by Armed Fulani Herdsmen (3,914). Boko Haram and ISWAP combined were responsible for 4% of abductions of Christians (422). For Muslims it was comparable: 71% of the Muslims abducted were abducted by Other Terrorist Groups (5,635); 24% by Armed Fulani Herdsmen (1,903). Boko Haram and ISWAP combined were responsible for 4% of the abductions of Muslims (300).

The category "Other Terrorist Groups" in ORFA research corresponds largely with the "armed 'bandits'" in this country dossier.

According to the US State Department [IRFR 2023 Nigeria](#):

- The government's ban on the Shiite Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) remained, while other Shia groups operated freely. In July 2023, security forces reportedly fired on an IMN Ashura procession in Abuja, injuring several people. In December 2023, IMN members commemorated the 2015 Zaria clash, with no progress on accountability for the 348 IMN members killed.
- Humanist Association President Mubarak Bala continued serving a 24-year sentence for insulting religion.
- At the end of 2023, Muslim singer Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, imprisoned since 2020, remained incarcerated and under sentence of death after being convicted of insulting the Prophet Muhammad due to song lyrics deemed blasphemous;
- Several blasphemy cases involving Muslim clerics were pending in Kano state High Court and the Kano Federal Court of Appeal.

- In August 2023, an Isele priest was detained for insulting Muslim leaders and forced to renounce his beliefs. According to his attorney, Abdulazeez was forced to renounce his belief in the Yoruba traditional spiritual system and pledge allegiance to the emirate in Ilorin as one of the preconditions of his release.
- Jewish groups reported discrimination due to lack of accommodation for Sabbath observance, affecting their participation in exams, elections and religious services.

Trends Summary

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. When former 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. The Fulani militants and armed 'bandits', Boko Haram and ISWAP 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, 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).

Particularly worrying are two new trends (for further details, see above: *Brief description of the persecution situation*): 1) Intensified attacks by the al-Qaeda-affiliated Lakurawa [jihadist group](#) (Truth Nigeria, 8 November 2024), armed with advanced weaponry and a [radical Islamic agenda](#) (The Conversation, 17 November 2024). 2) The reported emergence of a [unified ISWAP-Boko Haram front](#) (Truth Nigeria, 26 November 2024), which seems to confirm an ongoing alliance between jihadist groups in the Sahel.

3) Vicious circle of violence against Christians has led 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 went so far as to claim that Nigerian Christians were becoming “victims of a [process of ethnic cleansing](#) at the hands of Fulani Muslims, with the complicity of the state”. One leader from the diocese of Maiduguri “expressed frustration when he hears people refer to ‘clashes’ or ‘conflicts’ between opposing groups. ‘It is not a clash, it is a slow genocide. To displace people from their ancestral homeland, deprive them of their livelihood and butcher them is a form of genocide.’”

Regardless of whether or not the facts meet international legal definitions of ethnic cleansing or genocide, this vicious circle of violence can only be broken if the international community intervenes with humanitarian (and other forms of) aid, and puts pressure on the Nigerian government to come up with a comprehensive policy to address this complex and deadly situation. World Watch Research invites the international community to investigate whether the violence committed amounts to genocide and/or crimes against humanity.

4) Christians have allegedly begun to organize their own defense

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

5) Nigeria has 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 the Fulani Ethnic Militia (FEM), Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansaru and Lakurawa. 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.

Further useful reports

Further background information per country and a selection of in-depth reports and smaller articles are available on the Research & Reports pages of the Open Doors website:

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

External Links

- Copyright, sources and definitions: Background country information - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/wwl-background/>
- Copyright, sources and definitions: Persecution Dynamics - <https://www.opendoors.org/en-US/research-reports/country-dossiers/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: jihadist group - <https://truthnigeria.com/2024/11/lakurawa-new-jihadist-threat-operates-in-nigerias-seat-of-the-caliphate/>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: radical Islamic agenda - <https://theconversation.com/nigerias-terror-group-lakurawa-is-nothing-new-it-exists-because-of-governments-failure-analysts-243623>
- Brief description of the persecution situation: unified ISWAP-Boko Haram front - <https://truthnigeria.com/2024/11/deadly-alliance-iswap-boko-haram-merger-signals-new-threat/>
- 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>
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