

World Watch Research

# Nigeria: Background Information

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Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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## Contents

Copyright and sources .....	1
Map of country .....	2
Recent history .....	2
Political and legal landscape .....	6
Religious landscape.....	9
Economic landscape.....	10
Social and cultural landscape.....	11
Technological landscape .....	14
Security situation .....	14
Christian origins .....	20
Church spectrum today.....	21
Further useful reports.....	22
External Links .....	22

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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).

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## Map of country



Nigeria: Population (UN estimate for 2024)	Christians	Chr%
229,152,000	106,608,000	46.5

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

## Recent history

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

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

Caliphate and vowed to enforce Islam through the power of the sword from the Sahara Desert in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the south.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Since the resumption of constitutional rule in Nigeria in 1999, the People's Democratic Party (PDP) emerged as the dominant party winning all presidential elections except the 2015 and 2019 presidential elections. The country moved into a new chapter of history in May 2015 when Goodluck

Jonathan conceded defeat in the presidential election and passed power to the opposition, the All Progressive Congress (APC) with Muhammadu Buhari as president.

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

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

- Violence in the North-East was mainly perpetrated by Boko Haram, and after the split-off also by ISWAP.
- In the North-West there were the armed 'bandits'.
- In the North-Central there were the Fulani militants; also in the South-West and South-South geopolitical zones.
- In the South-East there have been separatist agitations as well as action by Fulani militants.

The circles of influence of these different groups have however increasingly overlapped, including their agendas. Boko Haram's Shekau, when still alive, was at least partly responsible for this. He had made a rigorous [shift in attitude](#) (HumAngle, 12 July 2020) and tried to forge alliances with various groups in northern Nigeria – such alliances included adherence to his radical Islamic agenda which was nothing less than to create chaos and have an 'Islamic state' in the North emerge from the ashes, presumably to be extended to the South too, and to parts of neighboring countries where Boko Haram and other groups are active. Many Boko Haram fighters have given up fighting, come out of their hiding places with their families and laid down their weapons. Indeed, Chief of Defense Staff, General Lucky Irabor made a public statement in March 2023, that "no fewer than [51,828 Boko Haram fighters](#) and their family members surrendered to the Federal Government between July 2021 and May 2022" (Vanguard, 26 March 2023). Further, in 2024, it was also announced that "[103 Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists](#) and their families surrendered to the Nigerian military in Borno State" in the period 21-23 May 2024 (Punch, 31 May 2024). The Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) operating in the Nigeria-Cameroon border area also reported that it had witnessed [263 Boko Haram surrenders](#) in the period 10-11 July 2024 (Channels TV, 19 July 2024).

Despite such cases of surrender, there have continued to be a devastating combination of violent incidents: Raids on predominantly Christian communities, sexual violence, road block killings etc. Abductions for ransom have increased considerably over recent years. Detailed research shows that this violence affects Christians in the country [disproportionally](#) (ORFA, Killings and Abductions in Nigeria, 24 February 2023). Apart from the outright violence, there are also many non-violent or 'squeeze' factors accompanying it, leading to intolerance and discrimination against Christians in their different spheres of life (such as education, employment, permission for building churches). A recent example was reported by [Truth Nigeria on 3 April 2024](#):

- Christian students at two university campuses in northern Nigeria said the university authorities had been prohibiting Christians from meeting for worship and fellowship. ADF International published details of academic staff locking up all Christian worship and fellowship centers at Yar Adua University. Students at the institutions have described heavy dress restrictions on female students, forcing Christian and religious minority women to wear the *hijab* and other Islamic forms of dress. The singling out of Christian students for discriminatory punishment for failure to comply has also been described by students. In Federal University Dutsima, students described the demolition of the Christian chapel and the refusal of the university authorities to allow Christians to freely worship. Members of the universities speaking to the media described an atmosphere of intimidation and hostility towards students who were not Muslims.

At the same time, the failure of the federal government and several state governments to protect their citizens, is striking (notwithstanding the examples of certain courageous state governors who do their best to protect the citizens in their responsibility, sometimes in extremely difficult circumstances). For example, on Easter Sunday evening, 31 March 2024, villages in Southern Kaduna were attacked in an area heavy with military installations. Rare eyewitness detail of the attack as it unfolded was published by [Truth Nigeria](#) on 2 April 2024 and reveals that government forces failed to respond to repeated calls for help.

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

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

### **The presidential election held on 25 February 2023**

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

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

Former President Buhari's federal government had appointed mostly northern Muslims to certain critical offices, including security agencies like the army, air force, police, immigration service, the Department of State Services (DSS), customs, Civil Defense Corps, prison service etc. The same applied increasingly for the judiciary in Nigeria, and for key economic sectors. A Nigerian analyst referred to this as "ethno-religious incursion of the establishment". The challenge in all this was the increasing and systematic denial of religious freedom violations against Christians by the government. After the elections in February 2023, and his inauguration in May 2023, President Tinubu replaced security chiefs (and other services) in a [major reshuffle](#), establishing a better balance between Muslim and Christian critical office holders (Al-Jazeera, 20 June 2023). It was hoped that this might signal a positive shift in recognition by the government of religious freedom violations against Christians, and more importantly, more effective intervention by security forces on behalf of Christians. However, one year after, continuous criticism of President Tinubu's largely ethnic-bias appointments remain. In 2024, the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA) issued a statement demanding equity in government appointments, claiming that "Tinubu's appointments reveal a continuation of the '[winner takes all](#)' system, heavily favoring Tinubu's South-west, while leaving other ethnic groups, notably the Igbo, underrepresented" (Politics Nigeria, 10 March 2024).

## Political and legal landscape

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

### Political landscape in Tinubu's first year as president

Among President Tinubu's first major steps was a series of appointments winning praise for their embrace of [religious and ethnic balance](#) in senior leadership positions (Daily Post 20 June 2023). The new president also embraced a free market approach, styling himself 'Nigeria's Top Salesman' and 'Nigeria's Marketing Officer,' in an appeal to the entrepreneurial spirit of Nigerians. However, severe challenges in the economy and security require major reform, and in his first year he has taken steps towards these. For instance, he scrapped Nigeria's fuel subsidy, pointing out the national cost of subsidizing cheap fuel nationwide. Inevitably, Nigeria's labor unions reacted furiously, announcing nationwide strikes which were averted by the [announcement](#) of a six month increase to the minimum

wage in response (BBC News, 1 October 2023). Further negotiations successfully led to the [Executive bill being speedily passed](#) at the National Assembly for the increased minimum wage (Channels TV, July 2024).

The government's monetary policy has also been transformed: The governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria was replaced, fixed exchange rates were abandoned and the currency markets were subsequently allowed to determine the value of the naira, causing the value of the naira to fall dramatically. As a result, fuel scarcity, fuel inflation, food inflation, and a devalued currency have been affecting citizens.

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

### **Legal landscape**

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

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

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

### Gender perspective

The Violence against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act of 2015 is Nigeria's first criminal legislation that recognizes a broad spectrum of violence - sexual, economic, physical, and psychological abuse - particularly against women and girls. This Act has been passed in all Nigerian states except Kano ([Partners West Africa Nigeria, VAPP Tracker, accessed 1 August 2024](#)). Domestic violence within marriages is widespread; in the Islamic northern region, husbands are permitted to discipline their wives so long as no 'grievous' bodily harm is caused (CEDAW 2017), and in the South, the Criminal Code Act considers assault on a woman as a 'misdemeanor' as opposed to a 'felony' if the victim were a man. Nigeria also ratified the CEDAW Convention in 1985 and the Optional Protocol in 2004, but was criticized in a [2017 NGO Coalition Shadow Report](#) for tacitly permitting child marriage; the report called for an overhaul of national legislation to ensure CEDAW is adequately integrated throughout laws and policies (NGO Coalition Shadow Report, June 2017, "Report of Nigeria on Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women").

Three marital regimes (civil, customary and Islamic) operate concurrently and lack uniformity. The federal government has no jurisdiction over Islamic or customary marriages and as such early marriage and polygamy are widespread. Furthermore, marital laws are particularly confining for women and girls in the North and Nigeria's plural legal system on marriage makes Christian girls vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage. This is true especially in the context of Sharia law, where girls are regularly abducted by Muslim fellow-citizens, brought, for example, to the [Emir of Gashua's palace](#) (Yobe state) or the [Emir of Katsina's palace](#), and forced into marriage with Muslims (Daily Post, 6 November 2017; Punch, 27 April, 2021).

In this environment, it is useful to note that just [3.62%](#) of seats in national parliament are currently held by women (Premium Times, accessed 24 July 2024).

## Religious landscape

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

Religion plays a pivotal role in Nigerian society. According to WCD 2024 estimates, 46.0% of the population is Muslim, while 46.5% is Christian. Although there is a religious fault-line between northern and southern Nigeria, the situation is not as clear-cut as it first appears. There are many Christians in the north and many Muslims are living in the south. The combined total of Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is 92.5% of the population. The 7.2% Ethnic religionists are spread throughout the country.

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

- **NORTH-WEST:** These 7 states (Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Sokoto, Zamfara) have 7,606,200 Christians (12%) out of a population of 63,577,000.
- **NORTH-CENTRAL:** These 6 states (Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau) and FCT (Abuja) have 16,695,200 Christians (50%) out of a population of 33,413,000.
- **NORTH-EAST:** These 6 states (Adamawa, Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Taraba, Yobe) have 6,949,700 Christians (22%) out of a population of 32,282,000.
- **SOUTH-WEST:** These 6 states (Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo) have 25,888,680 Christians (59%) out of a population of 43,541,000.

- **SOUTH-SOUTH:** These 6 states (Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Rivers) have 22,569,620 Christians (72%) out of a population of 31,511,000.
- **SOUTH-EAST:** These 5 states (Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo) have 19,166,690 Christians (77%) out of a population of 24,826,000.

The data listed above (based on WCD research, accessed May 2024) implies that religious and ethno-religious tensions can easily become a nationwide issue, as is currently happening.

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

- "There are Jewish communities in Abuja and Lagos led by the Chabad Lubavitch movement and comprised mostly of foreign residents. A larger community of Nigerian Jews – dividing themselves among Messianic, Sabbatarian, Community of Hashem, and Orthodox congregations – is present primarily in the South East and South South regions of the country."
- "Islam is the dominant religion in the North West and North East Regions, although significant Christian populations reside there as well. Christians and Muslims reside in approximately equal numbers in the North Central Region. Christianity is the dominant religion in the South West, including Lagos, which is also home to significant Muslim populations."
- "Ahmadi Muslims maintain a small presence in several cities, including Lagos and Abuja."
- "The Shia Muslim presence is heavily concentrated in the North West region."

## Economic landscape

Nigeria is Sub-Saharan Africa's largest economy and biggest oil exporter. At present, it relies heavily on oil as its main source of revenue and has the largest natural gas reserves on the continent. Efforts to diversify economic activities are limited by poverty and corruption ([Crisis24, Nigeria Country Report, accessed 30 July 2024](#)). Widespread dissatisfaction with the state of the economy and increasing food prices led to partly violent street demonstrations in many cities at the end of July and beginning of August 2024 ([BBC News, 1 August 2024](#)).

According to the [World Bank Macro Poverty Outlook Nigeria \(April 2024\)](#):

- **Economic growth:** "After growing by 3.6 percent in 2021, GDP growth slowed to 3.3 % in 2022 and then to 2.4 percent year-on-year (y-o-y) in H1 2023 and grew by 2.98% (year on year) in real terms in the 1st quarter of 2024 (National Bureau of Statistics, accessed 24 July 2024). The deceleration was driven by the continued weakness in oil production, lower agriculture output stemming from the sustained impact of severe floods in Q3 2022, and a disruptive and costly demonetization policy, which adversely impacted the non-oil industrial and service sectors. ... [T]he economy is expected to grow at an average of 3.4 percent in 2023-2025, higher than the past average of 1.4 percent in 2015-2022 and the estimated population growth, driven by services, trade, construction, and agriculture."

According to the [World Bank Nigeria overview](#) (last updated 21 March 2024):

- **Inflation:** "Weakened economic fundamentals led the country's inflation to reach a 24-years high of 31.7% in February 2024, and 34.2% in June 2024 (Nigeria Bureau of Statistics, accessed 24 June 2024) which, in combination with sluggish growth, has pushed millions of Nigerians into poverty."

- **Poverty:** “Based on World Bank projections, about [40.7](#) percent of Nigerians are estimated to live below the international poverty line by the end of 2024” (Poverty & Equity Brief, 2024), with an estimated 87 million Nigerians living below the poverty line — the world’s second-largest poor population after India.”

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

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

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

### Gender perspective

Women are - in general - more economically vulnerable than men, due to gender gaps in regards to education and labor force participation rates ([UNDP Human Development Report Nigeria](#), data updates as of 13 March 2024). Patrilineal inheritance practices and harmful practices against widows make it additionally challenging for women to gain economic independence.

## Social and cultural landscape

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

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

According to the [World Factbook Nigeria](#) (accessed 24 June 2024):

- **Main ethnic groups:** Hausa 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo (Ibo) 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/Berberi 2.4%, Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw/Izon 1.8%, other 24.7% (2018 est.)

- **Main languages:** English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, over 500 additional indigenous languages
- **Urban population:** 54.3% of total population
- **Rate of urbanization:** 3.92%
- **Median age:** 18.6 years
- **Literacy rate (adult, ages 15 and older):** 62.0% (female: 52.7%; male: 71.3%)
- **Expected years of schooling:** 10 years (female: 9.4 years; male: 10.6 years)
- **Youth not in school or employment (% ages 15-24):** 19.6% (female: 19.4%; male: 19.8%)
- **Population below poverty line:** 40.1% (2018 estimate)

According to [World Bank Nigeria data \(2021\)](#):

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

According to [UNICEF Nigeria](#) (accessed 24 June 2024):

- **Education:**
  - "In Nigeria, about 10.5 million children are not in school even though primary education is officially free and compulsory."
  - "One in every five of the world's out-of-school children is in Nigeria."
  - "Only 61 percent of 6-11 year-olds regularly attend primary school and only 35.6 percent of children aged 36-59 months receive early childhood education. In the north of the country, the picture is even bleaker, with a net attendance rate of 53 percent."
  - "States in the north-east and north-west have female primary net attendance rates of 47.7 percent and 47.3 percent, respectively, meaning that more than half of the girls are not in school. The education deprivation in northern Nigeria is driven by various factors, including economic barriers and socio-cultural norms and practices that discourage attendance in formal education, especially for girls."

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

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

According to the [UNHCR Country data](#) - last updated 30 June 2024:

- **IDPs:** 3,397,531 (especially located in parts of North-East, North-Central and also in North-West Nigeria).
- **Refugees:** 73,736, the vast majority from Cameroon (64,731, as of 31 January 2024 - [UNHCR Cameroonian Refugees Overview](#)).

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

According to [UNDP Human Development Report Nigeria](#) (data updates as of 13 March 2024):

- **HDI score and ranking (2022):** "Nigeria's HDI value for 2022 is 0.548— which put the country in the Low human development category—positioning it at 161 out of 193 countries and territories."
- **Gender inequality (2022):** "The 2022 female HDI value for Nigeria is 0.515 in contrast with 0.581 for males, resulting in a GDI value of 0.886, placing it into Group 5. ... Nigeria has a GII value of 0.677, ranking it 165 out of 166 countries in 2022."

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

### **Gender perspective**

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

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

## Technological landscape

According to [DataReportal Digital 2024: Nigeria](#) (23 February 2024) / survey date: January 2024:

- **Internet usage:** 45.5% penetration.
- **Social media usage:** 16.2% of the total population. According to [Napoleon Cat \(February 2024\)](#), 57.4% of Facebook users are male, compared to 42.6% female users.
- **Active cellular mobile connections:** 90.7% of the total population.

According to Freedom House's [Freedom on the Net 2023 Nigeria](#):

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

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

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

## Security situation

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

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

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

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

### **Kidnapping in general**

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

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

- **23 December 2022:** The abduction of 78 people in Goronyo LGA, Sokoto state on 23 December 2022, attributed to 'bandits' by media ([Daily Trust, 29 December 2022](#));

- **9 January 2023:** The abduction of 32 people from Tom Ikimi Station in Edo State, in the far south of the country in the Niger Delta, attributed by eyewitnesses to ‘armed Fulani herdsmen’ ([This Day, 9 January 2023](#));
- **7 April 2023:** 85 people were abducted in a single attack in Wanzamai village in Chafe LGA in Zamfara state. The Nigerian police stated the militants had demanded a 50-million-naira ransom (\$50,000) ([Daily Post, 10 April 2023](#)).
- **7 March 2024:** 287 school children were abducted in Kuriga town of Kaduna State by “motorcycle riding men”. It was reported that over 100 of the children, under 12 years of age were marched into the forest by the gunmen ([The Associated Press, 8 March 2024](#)).
- **9 March 2024:** 15 pupils were abducted from their sleep when gunmen broke into a boarding school in Gidan Bakuso village, Sokoto state ([OHCR, 15 March 2024](#)).
- **17 March 2024:** 87 persons were reportedly abducted in a community in Kajuru LGA of Kaduna state. The assailants were said to have also looted people’s shops ([The Cable, 18 March 2024](#)).

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

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

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

### **Kidnapping - the religious dimension**

As stated above, 3,300 Christians faced the trauma of abduction in the WWL 2024 reporting period. Christian leaders are, without doubt, a particular target for kidnapping: 39 Roman Catholic priests were reported abducted and murdered in 2022 ([The Tablet, 30 October 2023](#)), and 23 were kidnapped in 2023 ([ACN International, 13 November 2023](#)). Non-Catholics also experienced abductions, for example: Pastor Paul Musa of the Church of Christ in Nigeria in Kaduna was abducted on 23 March 2023, one of the hundreds of victims of Nigeria’s so-called ‘clergy abduction spree.’ As reported by Truth Nigeria on 29 June 2024, Boko Haram released [disturbing videos](#) of Pastor Paul Musa and his wife, calling for around \$40,000 US 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.

There follows a selection of recent cases of Christian pastors and priests being kidnapped or murdered:

- **December 2023:** Rev. Elkanah Ayuba and Rev. Simon Ezra, Methodist pastors, kidnapped along with 20 others. In a video clip Rev. Ayuba appeared to rehearse a political statement at gunpoint ([The Christian Post, 11 January 2024](#)).
- **July 2023:** Pastor Kayode Oluwakemi, of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, killed in church grounds in Ogun state ([Punch Nigeria, 3 July 2023](#)).

- **August 2023:** Two Christian brothers working at St Luke’s Anglican Hospital in Wususa, Kaduna state, were abducted on 25 August 2023. The abductions come after the Rev. Jeremiah Mayau, 61-year-old pastor of Tawaliu Baptist Church in Ungwan Mission, Kujama in Chikun County, was shot dead on 23 August 2023. ([Christian Headlines, 6 September 2023](#)).
- **September 2023:** Two trainee Roman Catholic priests were murdered in separate kidnapping incidents in one day: Ezekiel Nuhu and Na’aman Danlami ([CNA, 7 September 2023](#)).
- **October 2023:** Three young Roman Catholics were abducted, and one murdered, in an attack on the Annunciation Benedictine monastery, Eruku, Kwara state ([The Pillar, 25 October 2023](#)).
- **21 May 2024:** Two Catholic priests were abducted within 7 days – Father Oliver Buba of Yola diocese was kidnapped from his residence at the St. Rita Catholic Church in Numan LGA of Adamawa state on 21 May 2024, while Father Basil Gbuzo of Onitcha diocese was kidnapped on 15 May 2024 ([Crux, 23 May 2024](#)).
- **16 June 2024:** Catholic priest Christian Ike was kidnapped in Orumba North LGA of Anambra state. This was less than one month after Father Basil Gbuzo was kidnapped in the same state ([Vanguard, 17 June 2024](#)).

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

### **Fulani militia attacks**

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

Episodes of Fulani militia violence included the Mangu District of Plateau state in April and May of 2023 ([Vanguard Nigeria, 9 July 2023](#)). In 2024, as reported by Truth Nigeria on 23 April 2024, at least [three unarmed students](#) protesting on campus at Plateau state university near Jos in central Nigeria were shot dead by soldiers on 19 April 2024. Ongoing violence in Plateau state perpetrated by Fulani militia was the cause of the protest. Student groups accuse the security forces of ignoring pleas for help from local villages where their families live, many of whom are Christians. In mid-April 2024, a computer studies student, Dadin James Jordan, was one of five civilians killed in a radical Islamic attack as he defended his family home. When the students marched on 19 April to publicly accuse the government security forces of failing to protect civilians, they placed James Jordan’s corpse outside the military checkpoint at the University’s eastern entrance. It is understood a security hut was also set ablaze.

Benue state suffered waves of violence in the first quarter of 2023; hundreds of killing sprees resulting in 500+ murders in Benue alone in 2023 ([ACN International, 25 January 2024](#)). Benue state has continued to record consistent attacks in 2024 as well. International Christian Concern reported that on 19 July 2024, for instance, yet another attack was launched on the Mbacher community of Katsina-Ala LGA leading to the killing of 18 Christians with many other wounded as the attackers moved from house to house gathering villagers to a central point, where they shot them. This was just less than three weeks after an attack was launched on Ayati community which led to the killing of about 11 Christians ([ICC, July 2024](#)). The southerly encroachment of armed Fulani attacks is clear. Ten years ago, attacks in Benue state were considered strikes far in the south. By 2023, Benue state had become an epicenter of violence, and the outreaches were in the far south of the country, in Obetim Community, Delta state ([Leadership, 30 July 2023](#)), in Bayelsa state ([Ripples Nigeria, 28 March 2023](#)) and in the South West ([Punch Nigeria, 3 May 2023](#)).

### **Cults**

Another category of violent groups are so-called cults which were initially established as student societies to provide a sense of belonging, power and solidarity; however, over the years they have become a major menace to Nigerian society, contributing to the levels of violence across the country. Although their leaders deny it, they are responsible for "attacking and killing fellow students, armed robbery and general gangsterism tendencies", according to a Nigerian analyst. Cult members are mostly students in tertiary institutions but recently community-based groups have emerged without any affiliation to an institution; for instance, two rival cults fighting for supremacy in Naka, Benue state, led to the killing of two persons and many injured; government authorities had to impose a dusk to dawn curfew to contain the situation ([Vanguard, 16 May 2024](#)). Sometimes, the cult activities extend between states as recently happened when the Aiye cult confraternity planned a seven days initiation of new members across Benue and Plateau states; the police made 121 arrests ([Punch, July 2024](#)).

Normally cults are not related to or allied with jihadist groups. However, apart from the direct threat they pose to society, their activities have the potential to trigger extra tension in conflict zones, acting like a spark in a powder keg. For a detailed example, see [BBC News, 13 December 2021](#).

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

While the security situation in Nigeria has become very problematic, there has been a rather strong suspicion about the role of the Federal government's security apparatus in the country. In the past years, several cases were reported in which the security forces failed to protect citizens against attacks from violent groups. They either did not act or arrived too late at the scene of the violence; a reference point is the attack that happened on Easter Sunday evening, 31 March 2024, where villages in Southern Kaduna were attacked in an area heavy with military installations. Rare eyewitness detail of the attack

as it unfolded was published by [Truth Nigeria](#) on 2 April 2024 and reveals that government forces failed to respond to repeated calls for help.

WWR has received some reports that include a growing suspicion among those attacked that the security forces may have had a more active role in the violence. In the instance above, it was reported by Truth Nigeria that the 31 March attack occurred in Kachia county, which is home to several military facilities housing government troops. On the night of the attack, around 40-50 armed Fulani militia on motorbikes raided a series of villages over a 7-8 hour period. Eyewitnesses described young women resisting and fighting before being seized and handed out as wives to individual fighters as the village burned. According to village chiefs, repeated calls made to the local military stations went unanswered.

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

### **Gender perspective**

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

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

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

## Christian origins

African traditional religions were dominant in the southern part of the country before European missionaries introduced Christianity. The first Christian mission that reached Nigeria was during the Portuguese dominance of the Atlantic Coast in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, during that period, the [Portuguese Catholics](#) gave priority to economic and political activities, as a result of which Christian mission made no headway and most parts of the country continued to follow traditional African religions (Urhobo Historical Society, 1979). Following the British Empire's abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in 1807, another serious attempt was made to re-introduce Christianity to Nigeria. The liberated slaves who had already converted became instrumental in evangelizing the indigenous population. The case of [Samuel Adjai Crowther](#), who was the first Nigerian Anglican priest, can be taken as an example (Dictionary of African Christian Biography, last accessed 13 April 2023). He played a key role in evangelizing in Yorubaland. After witnessing the success of Crowther, Anglicans of the Church Missionary Society, Methodists, Baptists and Roman Catholics all increased efforts to have a strong Christian presence in Nigeria.

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

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

## Church spectrum today

Nigeria: Church networks	Christians	%
Orthodox	3,100	0.0
Catholic	27,942,000	26.2
Protestant	68,098,000	63.9
Independent	30,032,000	28.2
Unaffiliated	152,000	0.1
Doubly-affiliated Christians	-19,619,000	-18.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>106,608,100</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	50,313,000	47.2
Pentecostal-Charismatic	66,347,000	62.2

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

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

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



## Further useful reports

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

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

These are also available on the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom):

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

## External Links

- Recent history: religious conversions en masse - [https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Eat\\_the\\_Heart\\_of\\_the\\_Infidel/AC1hDwAAQBAJ](https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Eat_the_Heart_of_the_Infidel/AC1hDwAAQBAJ)
- Recent history: does not mention - <https://www.thecable.ng/review-secularity-nigerian-1999-constitution>
- Recent history: officially claimed - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/311160-boko-haram-is-defeated-nigeria-now-facing-global-insurgency-minister.html?tztc=1>
- Recent history: same claim - <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/headlines/257482-boko-haram-now-completely-defeated-nigerian-army.html>
- Recent history: killed - <https://humangle.ng/what-shekaus-death-means-for-security-in-nigeria-lake-chad/>

- Recent history: shift in attitude - <https://humangle.ng/nigerias-terror-king-shekau-connects-east-west-and-centre-in-a-puzzling-agenda/>
- Recent history: 51,828 Boko Haram fighters - <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/irabor-at-edo-varsity-founders-day-51828-boko-haram-fighters-surrender-in-18-months-cds/>
- Recent history: 103 Boko Haram and ISWAP terrorists - <https://punchng.com/103-bharam-commanders-families-surrendered-in-borno-dhq/>
- Recent history: 263 Boko Haram surrenders - <https://www.channelstv.com/2024/07/19/263-boko-haram-terrorists-surrender-at-nigeria-cameroun-border-army/>
- Recent history: disproportionately - <https://orfa.africa/wp/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Nigeria-Killings-and-Abduction-10-2019%E2%80%932021%E2%80%93final.pdf>
- Recent history: Truth Nigeria on 3 April 2024 - <https://truthnigeria.com/2024/04/discrimination-controversy-roils-christian-students-at-nigerias-northern-universities/>
- Recent history: Truth Nigeria - <https://truthnigeria.com/2024/04/fulani-terrorists-kidnap-35-persons-near-abuja-in-48-hours>
- Recent history: BBC News on 1 March 2023 - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-61732548>
- Recent history: sworn in - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/5/29/tinubu-sworn-in-as-nigerias-president-succeeds-buhari>
- Recent history: priorities - <https://theinsight.com.ng/bandits-test-tinubus-resolve-to-rout-them-out/>
- Recent history: no longer any need - <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2023/06/11/el-rufai-and-his-politics-of-religion>
- Recent history: major reshuffle - <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/6/20/nigerias-tinubu-removes-security-chiefs-in-major-reshuffle>
- Recent history: winner takes all' system - <https://politicsnigeria.com/majority-of-tinubus-appointments-favour-southwest-human-rights-group-laments/>
- Political and legal landscape: eligious and ethnic balance - <https://dailypost.ng/2023/06/20/service-chiefs-tinubu-unbiased-fair-in-appointments-youth-group/>
- Political and legal landscape: announcement - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-66976445>
- Political and legal landscape: Executive bill being speedily passed - <https://www.channelstv.com/2024/07/23/breaking-senate-speedily-passes-national-minimum-wage-bill/>
- Political and legal landscape: Bill to Establish the National Council for Christian Education - <https://www.icirnigeria.org/controversy-trails-cans-christian-education-bill/>
- Political and legal landscape: interference in freedom of worship - <https://guardian.ng/news/csos-kick-against-bill-to-regulate-christianity-in-nigeria/>
- Political and legal landscape: accuse a Christian nurse of blasphemy - <https://adfinternational.org/en-gb/news/rhoda-jatau-trial>
- Political and legal landscape: bail - <https://www.uscirf.gov/religious-prisoners-conscience/forb-victims-database/rhoda-jatau>
- Political and legal landscape: CAMA, 2020 - <https://dnlegalandstyle.com/2020/companies-and-allied-matters-act-2020-download/>
- Political and legal landscape: rejected the law - <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/1870/law-to-control-nigerian-churches-unacceptable-ungodly-reprehensible-christian-leaders>
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