

# FINAL WWL 2019 COUNTRY DOSSIER

## NIGERIA

### LEVEL 3/EMBARGO

(Reporting period: 1 November 2017 – 31 October 2018)

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## Introduction

### Copyright Notice

### Introduction

World Watch List Nigeria	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2019	80	12
WWL 2018	77	14
WWL 2017	78	12
WWL 2016	78	12
WWL 2015	78	10

*Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country was among the fifty highest scoring countries (Top 50) in the WWL 2015-2019 reporting periods.*

**Please note:** The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”.

## WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Nigeria

### Link for general background information

BBC country profile: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550>

### Recent country 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 what now called Nigeria used to be controlled by multiple small African kingdoms before the British colonial period. The conquest of what is now Nigeria started with the annexation of Lagos as a colony by the British Crown in the 1850s which led to the establishment of further protectorates and colonies in the region. After the amalgamation of these various colonies and protectorates in 1914 the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria came into existence.

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria went through a series of civilian administrations which were overthrown by the army. After sixteen years of military rule by four different generals, in which transition to democracy and civilian rule were continually postponed, the Fourth Republic was inaugurated with a new constitution in 1999. The transition that had eluded Nigeria for more than a decade and half was made possible partly due to the sudden death of the military dictator General Sani Abacha. Upon his death, his successor, General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar, oversaw a quick transition to civilian rule and promulgated a new constitution. Since the resumption of constitutional rule in Nigeria in 1999, the People's Democratic Party emerged as the dominant party winning all presidential elections except the 2015 presidential election. The country moved into a new chapter of history in May 2015 when Goodluck Jonathan conceded defeat in the presidential elections and passed power to the opposition. Over the past years, the country has been fighting an insurgency in parts of the Niger Delta region and Islamic militants in the northern parts of the country. The administration of President Buhari claims that Boko Haram has been defeated in military terms. Nevertheless Boko Haram still continues to be a menace to Nigerians particularly in the northern part of the country. Raids against predominantly Christian farmers in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria by Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen has also become an increasingly serious problem.

### The religious landscape

Nigeria is a religious and ethnically diverse nation. Religion is a significant fault-line in Nigeria: The southern part of Nigeria is predominantly inhabited by Christians while northern Nigeria is mainly inhabited by Muslims. This harks back to the restrictions placed on missionary activity in northern Nigeria during colonial times and the dominance of Muslim traders operating in the northern parts of the country before and during the colonial period. This regional religious divide also coincides with the ethnic divide in Nigeria. Among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Hausa-Fulani of northern Nigeria are predominantly Muslim, the Igbo of south-eastern Nigeria are mainly Christian, while the Yoruba of south-western Nigeria have both a significant Muslim and Christian population. The next general election is scheduled to be held in February 2019. As in previous years, this election also looks very likely to be controversial.

## The political 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 solidarity. Historically the Muslim Hausa-Fulani politicians are perceived as being dominant in Nigerian politics, 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 the revenue derived from the country's considerable oil resources. Corruption is rampant and a serious problem in Nigeria both at national and federal level.

Nigeria has been a federal state since its independence in 1960. The British tried to divide the country up according to the three main ethnic groups by establishing three federal states with Hausa in the north, Yoruba in the south-west and Igbo in south-east. This gradually led to serious tribal conflict after independence and the country's governments were forced to establish more states; currently there are 36 states. Twelve northern Nigerian states have adopted Sharia law making Islam increasingly influential. Political violence is also a characteristic feature of Nigerian politics since 1999. In addition to the Biafra civil war of the 1960's the ongoing insurgency in the Niger Delta shows the persistence of political violence even in contemporary Nigeria. The north-south divide, which coincides largely with religious and ethnic divisions has been a major fault-line in Nigerian politics.

## The socio-economic landscape

Nigeria is ranked 152 out of 188 countries on the UNDP Human [Development Index \(2018 Statistical Update\)](#). (The Human Development Index, HDI, is a composite statistic of life expectancy, education, and income per capita indicators. A country scores higher HDI when the life expectancy at birth is longer, the education period is longer, and the income per capita is higher.)

According to the UN [Human Development Report](#) 2018, the average life expectancy of Nigerians is 53.1 years old and the adult literacy rate is 59.6%. According to the same report, the Gross National Income (GNI) per capita of Nigeria is estimated to be 5,443. Nigeria has a very young population and a high rate of unemployment. In economic terms as well as in the provision of social services, northern Nigeria is less advanced in comparison with southern Nigeria. The export of crude oil is the major source of revenue for the Nigerian state and the mainstay of the economy. In 2016, the country experienced another serious economic crisis and was forced to devalue its currency again.

## Concluding remarks

Nigeria is a giant in Africa fraught with many complicated problems. Due to its size and human and natural resources, it has the potential to be a strong force on the continent. However, the political instability, insecurity and rampant corruption that have characterized the country for decades and still persist, have weakened it considerably. Regional, ethnic and religious tensions and competition among politicians exacerbate the problem. The extent to which these issues are addressed will determine whether or not Nigeria will be able to realize its potential and become a prosperous and stable country. However, the current trends in the country seem to indicate that Nigeria will continue to be a country struggling to stay afloat. As the country is heading for presidential elections in February 2019, it is very difficult to predict the political alliance and the new security threats that might emerge.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Keys to understanding Nigeria

- The socio-economic landscape: Development Index (2018 Statistical Update).  
<http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/NGA>
- The socio-economic landscape: Human Development Report  
[http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr\\_2018\\_nigeria\\_finalfinalx3.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2018_nigeria_finalfinalx3.pdf)

## WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

### How many Christians?

Pop 2018	Christians	Chr%
195,875,000	91,122,000	46.5

Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)

### How did Christians get there?

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

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

Christian missionaries were less successful in the northern part of the country where the Hausa-Fulani tribal kingdoms were already Muslim. There were very few conversions of Muslims to Christianity during the colonial period.

### What church networks exist today?

Church networks: Nigeria	Christians	%
Orthodox	54,200	0.1
Catholic	25,920,000	28.4
Protestant	58,349,000	64.0
Independent	34,597,000	38.0
Unaffiliated	149,000	0.2
Doubly-affiliated Christians	- 27,947,000	-30.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>91,122,200</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	40,166,000	44.1
Renewalist movement	59,058,000	64.8

*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: Believers who do not identify with the major Christian traditions (Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Protestant). Unaffiliated Christians: Persons professing publicly to be Christians but who are not affiliated to churches. Doubly-affiliated Christians: Persons affiliated to or claimed by 2 denominations at once. Evangelical movement: Churches, denominations, and individuals who identify themselves as evangelicals by membership in denominations linked to evangelical alliances (e.g., World Evangelical Alliance) or by self-identification in polls. Renewalist movement: Church members involved in Pentecostal/Charismatic renewal.*

*Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)*

According to WCD 2018, the largest Christian denominations in Nigeria are the Catholic Church in Nigeria, the Anglican Church of Nigeria, the Evangelical Church Winning All, the Nigerian Baptist Convention, the Apostolic Church of Nigeria, the Celestial Church of Christ, the Fellowship of Churches of Christ of Nigeria and the Assemblies of God in Nigeria.

## Religious context

Religious Context: Nigeria	Numbers	%
Christians	91,122,000	46.5
Muslim	90,269,000	46.1
Hindu	35,400	0.0
Buddhist	10,300	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	13,820,000	7.1
Jewish	1,200	0.0
Bahai	46,200	0.0
Atheist	51,800	0.0
Agnostic	495,000	0.3
Other	25,300	0.0

*OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.*

*Source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A (eds.), World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed January 2018)*

Religion plays a pivotal role in Nigerian society. According to WCD 2018 estimates, 46.1% of the population is Muslim. Even though Nigeria is constitutionally a secular state with freedom of religion enshrined in the constitution, for nearly 40 years the northern ruling elite have been giving preferential treatment to Muslims and discriminating against Christians. Since 1999, Sharia law has been imposed in 12 northern States to the resentment of Christians, causing a very high level of concern. Also, in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, the Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen/settlers are killing and displacing Christians and taking over their farmland. Little has been done to stop the persecution of Christians in these areas.

## Notes on the current situation

Although there has always been rivalry between the Muslim north and the Christian south since the country's independence, it has not been a major concern. However, in recent years the rivalry has intensified through the movement called Boko Haram. The impact this radical Islamic group has made is immense. Boko Haram has carried out many violent attacks against Christians in the northern states that have resulted in widespread killings and the destruction of churches. Recurrent attacks on

Christian communities in the Middle Belt region by Hausa-Fulani herdsmen are also causing suffering for [thousands](#). The government has been unable to decisively tackle these problems and hence Christians suffer greatly from violent attacks that result in their displacement, dispossession and often death.

### External Links - WWL 2019: Church History and Facts

- How did Christians get there?: Portuguese Catholics  
<http://www.waado.org/UrhoboCulture/Religion/Erivwo/HistoryOfChristianity/ChapterOne.html>
- How did Christians get there?: Samuel Adjai Crowther  
[http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/crowther5\\_samuel.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/crowther5_samuel.html)
- Notes on the current situation: thousands  
<https://www.csw.org.uk/2018/06/29/news/4017/article.htm>

## WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

With a score of 80 points, Nigeria ranked 12th in WWL 2019. In recent years, the country has consistently ranked in the top 20.

### What type of persecution dominates?

**Islamic oppression:** Although the Islamic militant group Boko Haram is most often associated with the persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria, the pattern of persecution is more complex than simply the killing of Christians by radical Islamic militants. This is especially so in the twelve northern Sharia states where local government and communities leave little freedom for Christians to live out their faith. Violence is also perpetrated by Muslim Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt region attacking Christian homes. All Christians are affected by this Persecution engine, with converts from a Muslim background being the most highly affected Christian group. It can be very dangerous to live as a Christian person in the northern part of the country. Sharia law is the law of the land in 12 Muslim dominated states; it is illegal to convert from Islam to another religion there and often Christians are made to feel that they do not belong.

**Organized corruption and crime:** Nigeria is one of the most corrupt nations in the world. It ranks as the 148th most corrupt country according to [transparency international's](#) Corruption Perceptions Index 2017. A large number of government officials and private interest groups are involved in corruption and criminal activities. Criminal networks engage in extortion and kidnapping, and corrupt officials contribute to the weak and ineffectual response by Nigerian security forces to attacks on Christians perpetrated by Islamic groups. The impact of criminal networks in the country goes beyond Nigeria's borders and has international repercussions.

### Who is driving persecution?

Hostility towards Christians is often spread by radical Islamic teaching and practice. This is reinforced by the fact that Islam is the dominant religion in the northern part of Nigeria while Christianity is dominant in the south. The rivalry between ethnic groups in the south and the north often has a spill-over effect contributing to the persecution of Christians. Radical armed groups such as Boko Haram and Fulani Muslim herdsmen have been particularly active in the persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria and the Middle Belt region. The violence in the Middle Belt area indicates that the violent persecution of Christians in the country is spreading southwards. Further, there is corruption at all levels of government, and criminal groups (often organized along ethnic lines) are engaged in human and drug-trafficking. Both occasionally give rise to the persecution of Christians. What is making the issue more complex is that some politicians regard the violence in the Middle Belt as a resource-based conflict devoid of any religious issues.

### What it results in

Most Christians in the southern part of the country live in an environment in which their religious freedom is respected. However, Christians in the north and in the Middle Belt suffer from violence perpetrated by militant Islamic groups. Such violence often results in the loss of life, physical injury as well as loss of property. As a result of the violence, Christians are also being dispossessed of their land and means of livelihood. Christians in northern Nigeria, especially in the Sharia states, face

discrimination and exclusion as second-class citizens. Christians with a Muslim background also face rejection from their own families and pressure to give up Christianity.

Corruption has enfeebled the state and has made it ill-equipped to protect Christians from the actions of violent Islamic groups. Sometimes, churches are used as vehicles for money-laundering; churches that are perceived to be associated with such criminal activity (i.e. receiving donations from criminal benefactors) can also end up being targets for crime-related violence.

## Violence

The following table is based on reported cases. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. However, even these minimum numbers should be a cause for concern among politicians and the international community.

Nigeria	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2019	01 Nov 2017 - 31 Oct 2018	3731	21850	116	569	29444
WWL 2018	01 Nov 2016 - 31 Oct 2017	2000	2752	14	22	5120

*Christians killed refers to the number of Christians killed for faith-related reasons (including state-sanctioned executions). Christians attacked refers to the number of Christians abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, forced into marriage to non-Christians or otherwise physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) for faith-related reasons. Christians arrested refers to the number of Christians detained without trial or sentenced to jail, labor camp, sent to psychiatric hospital as punishment or similar things for faith-related reasons. Churches attacked refers to the number of churches or Christian buildings (schools, hospitals, cemeteries, etc.) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons. Christian-owned houses and shops attacked refers to the number of houses of Christians or other property (including shops and businesses of Christians) attacked, damaged, bombed, looted, destroyed, burned down, closed or confiscated for faith-related reasons.*

## Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period

- On 24 April 2018, Fulani herdsmen attacked a Catholic church during a morning service, killing 2 priests and 17 [parishioners](#) in Benue State. They then moved to the local community and burned down 60 houses, farmland and food barns.
- On 23 June 2018, 120 Christians were killed by Fulani herdsmen in Plateau [State](#) as they returned from attending a funeral. Churches in the area did not hold Sunday services on 24 June, fearing further major attacks.
- On 17 February 2018, Boko Haram militants attacked a Christian farming village in Borno State. The attack, in which 106 people were [killed](#), specifically targeted male residents of the Christian community.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Short & Simple Persecution Profile

- What type of persecution dominates?: transparency international's <https://www.transparency.org/country/NGA>

- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: parishioners  
<https://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2018/april/nigeria-fulani-attack-catholic-church-benue-boko-haram.html>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: State  
<http://www.bnnews.net/51177/pastor-120-nigerian-christians-killed-leaving-funeral>
- Examples of specific persecution in the reporting period: killed,  
<https://edition.cnn.com/2014/02/16/world/africa/nigeria-boko-haram-attacks/index.html>

## WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

### Introduction

Reporting period: 1 November 2017 - 31 October 2018

### Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 80 points, Nigeria ranked 12th in WWL 2019. In WWL 2018, Nigeria ranked 14th with a score of 77. The score for average pressure rose from 12.1 to 12.7 reflecting in particular the increased daily pressure on Christians living in predominantly Muslim communities in the north. The score for violence also rises to 16.7, the maximum possible. Violence against Christians by Boko Haram and Fulani Herdsmen has caused tremendous suffering among Christians in the northern parts of the country as well in the Middle Belt.

### Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Nigeria	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Ethnic antagonism	EA	Weak
Denominational protectionism	DPR	Not at all
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Not at all
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Medium

*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 (long version).*

#### Islamic oppression (Very strong):

Islamic oppression has become the most dominant Persecution engine in Nigeria, especially after the intensification of violence instigated by the Islamic militant group, Boko Haram. Although this group is most often associated with the persecution of Christians in northern Nigeria, the pattern of persecution is much more complex than simply the killing or wounding of Christians (and moderate Muslims) by Islamic militants. Muslim pressure groups, religious leaders, community members and families are also involved in the persecution of Christians. This is especially so in the twelve northern Sharia states where local government and communities leave little freedom for Christians to live out their faith. In line with the violent traditions of the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s and the Sharia implementation of 2001, Christians in northern Nigeria have increasingly become targets for jihadist attacks. Building on this, Boko Haram has, for the past few years, carried out a systematic campaign against the Nigerian state, specifically targeting Christians in its ideology, rhetoric, and actions with the intent of establishing an Islamic state. Using the rhetoric of radical Islam, it declared an Islamic caliphate in Gwoza, Borno State, in August 2014. The expansion of this caliphate has now been stopped by government forces, but the violence caused by Boko Haram continues to affect thousands of people (especially Christians) and fosters a mutual distrust between Christians and Muslims in the entire region, if not country.

Violence is also being perpetrated by Islamic assailants commonly identified as Fulani herdsmen, who descend on predominantly Christian villages in the Middle Belt region (often at night) attacking innocent people, including women and children. There have also been reports that the state

governments of Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Taraba States are pushing to establish and reserve grazing fields for Muslim Fulani herdsman. This means that swathes of land are being taken away from indigenous Christian communities for that purpose, depriving Christians of their farming fields and livelihood. For a better understanding of the background to the violence in these states see the recent series of [detailed Focus Nigeria reports](#) prepared by World Watch Research and partners (password freedom). What is making the issue transnational is the fact that Boko Haram is also operating in neighboring counties. This group can recruit members in Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Cameroon and other states. That means that even if the situation in Nigeria gets tougher for them, they can easily regroup in those other countries.

**Organized corruption and crime (Medium):**

There are numerous criminal networks operating in the country. According to [Global Security \(February 2016\)](#): "The most profitable activity of the Nigerian groups is drug trafficking - delivering heroin from Southeast and Southwest Asian into Europe and the US and cocaine from South America into Europe and South Africa." These networks of organized crime are a threat to churches where they engage in extortion and at times kidnapping. Christians have also been specifically targeted for killings in southern Nigeria by such groups. The pervasive nature of corruption in the country has also contributed to the weak and ineffectual nature of the response by Nigerian security forces to the threats faced by Christians who are attacked by Boko Haram and Muslim Fulani herdsman.

**Drivers of persecution**

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

*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 (long version).*

**Drivers of Islamic oppression:**

Violent groups, community leaders, family (both extended and nuclear) have been the most common drivers of persecution in Nigeria. In the north, radical Muslim groups such as Boko Haram have been attacking, killing, torturing and abducting Christians over the last few years. There are also several Islamic pressure groups that influence the general Muslim community to attack and persecute Christians. Also, some government officials are act as drivers of this Persecution engine.

**Drivers of Organized corruption and crime:**

Corrupt government officials and criminal groups engage in drug trafficking and in some parts of southern Nigeria some groups also try to use churches as convenient instruments for money-laundering. As a result, churches, and Christians get entangled in the conflicts and violence of such groups. Corrupt officials are also responsible for the persecution of Christians in the northern part of the country through inaction, when they ignore Christian persecution exerted by Muslim pressure groups or do not punish the perpetrators of acts of violence. There were also a few cases where corrupt officials were directly involved in the persecution of Christians for reasons related to faith.

**Context**

On 29 May 2015, Muhammadu Buhari was sworn in as the fourth president of Nigeria since the adoption of the current Nigerian Constitution. In his [inauguration speech](#) he promised to bring “increased prosperity” to the country, and also vowed to tackle corruption and the insurgency headed by Boko Haram which he described as “a mindless, godless group, who are as far away from Islam as one can think”. In fact, the Nigerian army has been relatively successful in driving Boko Haram away from the territories it had occupied. However, despite this success in fighting Boko Haram, which has been responsible for much of the violence against Christians in recent years, the continuing violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria remains an enormous source of concern. As reported by World Watch Research in 2015 in the report “[Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria](#)”, a [vicious circle of violence in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria](#) is taking place in the shadow of Boko Haram. Attacks perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen and settlers have led to the [deaths of thousands of Christians](#), with hundreds of churches and properties targeted and destroyed.

The persecution of Christians through *Islamic oppression* does not extend to the whole of Nigeria, however. Looking from the point of view of hostilities against Christians, the Nigerian landscape can be divided into distinct regions:

- The North (19 states & the Abuja Federal Capital Territory) is mainly Muslim, with Christian majority states in the Middle Belt. Large parts of the Middle Belt have become part of the twelve so-called Sharia-states in the North. For example, Kaduna-North is a Muslim majority, Kaduna-South is a Christian majority, but the Kaduna administration is Muslim dominated.
- The South (17 states) is mainly Christian, but the South-West (Yoruba) has a large Muslim population.

With nearly two hundred ethnic and tribal groups and five hundred languages, Nigeria is one of the most complex nations on the African continent. The persecution of Christians overlaps with clashes over the control of resources in some states. According to human rights activists and reports, the Nigerian government barely investigates the killings and abuses of Christians at the hands of radical Islamic organizations and/or individuals. By doing so, the government has failed to fulfill its international obligation as enshrined under UNCHR and ICCPR. In addition, it has been widely reported that Boko Haram has been doing all it can to incite conflict between Muslim and Christian communities.

With elections approaching in February 2019, it is possible that tension will increase. The two main rivals in the presidential election are incumbent Muhammadu Buhari, a northerner belonging to the All Progressives Congress party (APC) and Atiku Abubakar, also a northerner with four wives and 28 children from the People's Democratic Party PDP.

## Christian communities and how they are affected

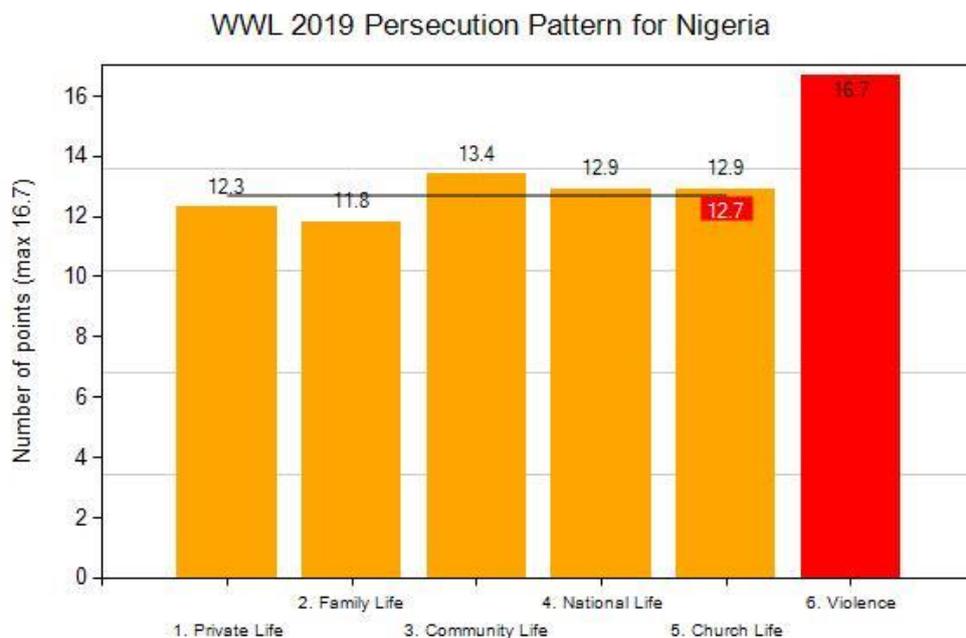
**Communities of expatriate Christians:** Expatriate Christians in Nigeria are not forced into isolation. This category is therefore not scored separately in the WWL analysis.

**Historical Christian communities:** In Nigeria these include the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations such as Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans. In the context of the Boko Haram conflict, it was expected that the number of Christians would decrease. While it is true that Christians have been the majority of the victims killed, displaced or forced to migrate, there are indications that the Christian population may be growing despite of that. Field research has shown that, in the midst of the conflict, Roman Catholics are creating more dioceses and Protestant Christianity is growing faster than might have been expected.

**Converts to Christianity:** In the northern Sharia states, abandoning Islam is illegal. Thus, conversion from Islam to Christianity is a dangerous act that can lead to many hardships including death threats, beatings and arrests. Due to these reasons, most convert Christians of Muslim background do not discuss or express their faith in public. There are numerous underground house churches in the northern part of the country.

**Non-traditional Christian communities:** The number of Evangelical and Pentecostal communities is increasing in Nigeria. They now constitute about 20% of the Nigerian Church, and this figure is rising. In many of the northern states, they are confronted with hardships along with all other types of Christianity including violent attacks against their life and property by militant groups and discrimination by the local authorities.

## Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence



The WWL 2019 persecution pattern for Nigeria shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nigeria is 12.7, an increase of 0.6 compared to WWL 2018.
- All *spheres of life* score above 11 points out of the maximum of 16.7 and are thus pressure is at a very high level throughout. Pressure is highest in the community sphere (13.4).
- The score for violence is the maximum achievable score (16.7), an increase of 0.2 compared to WWL 2018.

#### **Private sphere:**

The private life of Christians living in the northern and Middlebelt part of the country has been obstructed by radical Islamic groups such as Boko Haram. This is particularly true in Bauchi, Gombo, Yobe and Borno States. more and more Christians find themselves under pressure not to display outwardly Christian symbols or the Bible. In fact, around Ganye, Jada and most parts of Borno and Yobe States, an increasing number of Christians (not just converts) dress like Muslims to hide any Christian articles or materials on them and to escape being lynched. The private life of convert Christians of Muslim background will be more dangerous in the Muslim northern part of the country. Almost all convert Christians do not discuss or express their faith openly. They usually worship in hiding.

#### **Family sphere:**

Family life is hindered and in some cases made dangerous for Christians, particularly for those living in the northern part of the country, where Christians cannot bury their deceased in public cemeteries and Christian girls are under a serious threat of abduction and [forced marriage](#). The danger of living as a Christian will be greater if the Christian is a convert from Islam. Such Christians will not even talk about their faith to another person in the northern part of the country.

#### **Community sphere:**

The pressure in this *sphere of life* is mainly a problem in northern Nigeria, especially in the Sharia states. In this part of the country, Christian children are forced to participate in Islamic studies in state schools (especially at the primary and secondary level). Christian youth are often hindered from accessing secondary schools or higher education institutions in northern Nigeria, especially when those institutions are well-funded and have good equipment and high-quality teaching. Christian students in northern Nigeria are often considered and treated as second-class citizens. Christian communities in northern Nigeria are also discriminated against in the provision of humanitarian aid despite being displaced by the violence of [Boko Haram](#). This issue is so prevalent that the safety of Christians in the northern state is compromised. Christians are very susceptible to kidnapping from their schools, hence it is understandable if some Christians decide not to send their children to schools.

#### **National sphere:**

In the *national sphere* as well, the problem is mainly in the northern states. Qualified Christians are often denied employment, and some are asked to give up their Christian faith in order to obtain immediate employment. In the northern Sharia states, Christians live in fear because of the unpredictable environment in which local government officials put pressure on them, sometimes assisted by Hisba (Sharia Police) and Dawah (Islamic missionary) committees. Even though the pressure against Christians is less in the non-Sharia northern states (in comparison to the Sharia states), Christians still face discrimination and find it difficult to get jobs in the public sector. Converts from

Islam in the northern part of the country are more affected than any other Christian group. Conversion is illegal in the twelve Sharia law states, so many converts leave the northern part of the country.

**Church sphere:**

Churches which operate in northern Nigeria are finding it increasingly difficult to conduct Christian worship. There have been numerous attacks on churches during the past years. They are in a more dangerous situation if they try to integrate converts from Islam openly. This would attract the attention of the Islamic community, which could result in violent actions against the churches in their entire area. As the data for WWL 2019 shows, hundreds of churches were attacked in the country, mostly in the northern states and the Middle Belt. Pastors are also increasingly becoming targets for attacks by radical Muslims to stop any further growth of the Church.

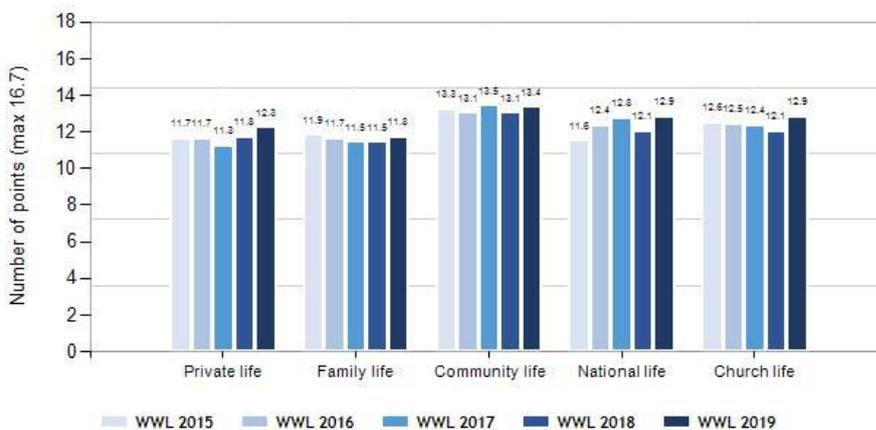
**Violence:**

Violence against Christians in Nigeria has been extremely high in the WWL 2019 reporting period as has been the case in the past reporting periods as well. Boko Haram has kept up its attacks on Christians and Muslim Fulani herdsmen are responsible for even more Christian deaths than Boko Haram. Attacks by armed groups of Muslim Fulani herdsmen have resulted in the killing, maiming, dispossession and eviction of thousands of Christians. For a summary of the statistics on violence and examples, please see the Short and Simple Persecution Profile section above.

5 Year trends

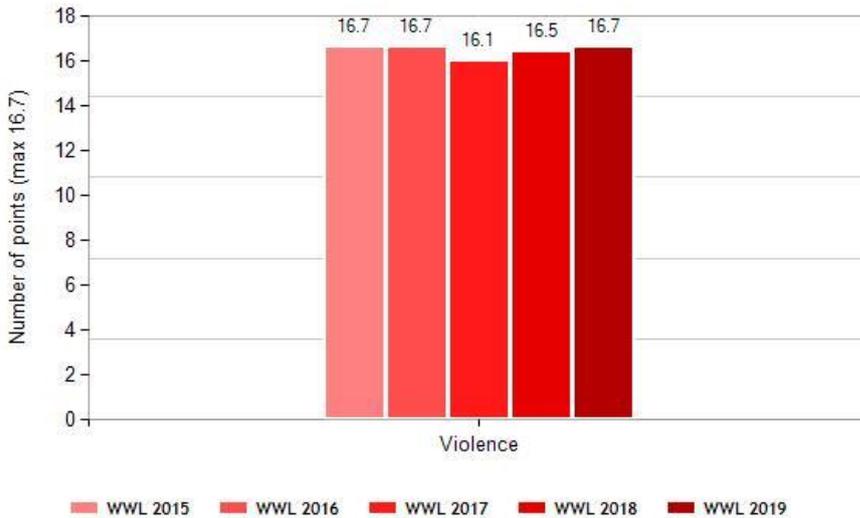
The three charts below show the situation for Christians in Nigeria over the last five reporting periods. **Chart 1** clearly shows that the suffering of Christians in all *spheres of life* has been stable at a very high level, with the highest levels of pressure being reached in the WWL 2019 reporting period. The *community sphere of life* has consistently scored 13.0 or above. This is a reflection of the fact that, even though persecution is present in all *spheres of life* in Nigeria, it is more embedded in *Community life* where non-state actors play a key role. The Church and national spheres have also consistently scored 12.0 points or more and this also reflects the challenges that Christians face in their communities. **In Chart 2**, the average pressure has consistently been above 12.0 over the last five years, reaching 12.7 in this reporting period (WWL 2019). **Chart 3**, depicting the violence scores over the last five reporting periods, shows the very stable, extreme level of violence targeting Christians. Three out of the five years show maximum scores.

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Nigeria (Spheres of life)



WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Pattern history: Nigeria	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2019	12.7
2018	12.1
2017	12.3
2016	12.3
2015	12.2

WWL 2015 - WWL 2019 Persecution Profile for Nigeria (Violence)



## Gender specific persecution

### Female:

Women and girls have often been abducted and subjected to sexual assault and rape. This has been the common practice of both Boko Haram and Muslim Fulani herdsmen. Many of them are also forced into marriage with non-Christians. The fact that there are laws which permit under-age marriage in some states (as well the existence of cultural and religious norms that discourage girls from going to school) only contributes to this problem. The persecution of women and girls has a detrimental effect on the Church and Christian families. In addition to the great emotional toll and social cost of such persecution, in some communities where widows are the main breadwinners of the family, such persecution of women also affects the economic well-being of the community. To understand the background and context of violence against women as a form of persecution in northern Nigeria, see: "[Our Bodies, Their Battleground](#) - Boko Haram and Gender-Based Violence against Christian Women and Children in North-Eastern Nigeria since 1999".

### Male:

Christian men and boys have often been targeted specifically, especially in the north-eastern part of the country where Boko Haram has been active. Many have been attacked, abducted and forced to join the militant group. Such attacks have a devastating effect on the Church and Christian families.

## Persecution of other religious minorities

Apart from Christians, Nigerian Shia Muslims also face persecution in northern Nigeria including violent attacks from Sunni groups. Jehovah's Witnesses are also a religious minority in Nigeria facing discrimination and violence, particularly in northern Nigeria. In short, any religious minorities who do not belong to the majority Islam teaching in the northern states face pressure and violence in one way or another.

## Future outlook

**The political outlook:** One of the most complex and corrupt nations in West Africa, Nigeria has been struggling with deep-rooted issues. The rise of Boko Haram in the last decade has made the situation even more complex. The political alliances reflect this complex reality with Christians and Muslims running in elections together to appeal to a wider voting base. It is with this understanding that, for example, a Muslim presidential candidate for a major party from the north will often pick a Christian from the South as running mate and vice versa.

In the past five years, Christians in Nigeria have faced some of the deadliest attacks perpetrated by Islamic militants. The Global Terrorism Index 2018 also indicates that in 2017, Nigeria ranked [3<sup>rd</sup>](#) on the list of countries most affected by terrorism. The responses by the government are clearly not enough, since perpetrators of such violence are able to continue attacking Christians with impunity. These issues are going to remain serious problems for Christians and the Nigerian government. Although the Nigerian army's campaigns have been somewhat effective against Boko Haram activities, the latter is making more frequent inroads into neighboring countries such as Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. If the Nigerian state and other countries in the region congratulate themselves too soon and declare victory too early, Boko Haram will get an opportunity to regroup and continue its attacks against Christians in Nigeria and other countries in the region. Therefore, the situation of Christians in northern Nigeria is partly contingent upon whether or not the government of Nigeria and other countries in the region will come up with more effective and comprehensive plans and continue the fight against Boko Haram without relenting.

### The outlook for Christians - through the lens of:

- *Islamic oppression:* The situation for Christians in many parts of Nigeria is precarious, to say the least. In some areas, the violence against Christians includes the crime of [ethnic cleansing as outlined by WWR](#). The Persecution engine *Islamic oppression* is likely to persist in Nigeria in the foreseeable future and keep northern Nigeria a dangerous place for Christians. The government has so far appeared reluctant to take decisive measures against the violence perpetrated by Fulani herdsmen/settlers fighting for the control of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. As the next presidential election on 16 February 2019 looms closer, this is likely to have significant ramifications on the ground in Nigeria. There is a risk that ethnicity and religion will be used as instruments for mobilizing support on the campaign trail.

**Conclusion:** Since President Buhari came to power, military offensives have at least led to the decimation of Boko Haram in numbers. But Boko Haram militants have shown their resilience by moving to weak neighboring countries. There are also numerous attacks in the Middle Belt regions and the government has not produced any working plan to solve the crisis. As a result, both the Middle Belt and northern Nigeria have huge numbers of IDPs, many of whom are Christians. Many of them are not taken care of by national or international aid agencies. They are a visible witness to the supremacy of the persecutors and to the high vulnerability of the persecuted in this region. And this, in turn, encourages further violence with impunity and culminates in constant fear among the Christian

population where attacks are common. This vicious circle can only be broken when the international community intervenes with humanitarian (and other forms of) aid, when the government comes up with a comprehensive policy to address this complex and deadly situation. These issues make up the context for the upcoming elections scheduled for February 2019. Ethnicity and religion are likely to be used as instruments for mobilizing support on the campaign trail. However, the elections could make the ruling party and president more responsive to the demands and concerns of Christians. However, the risk of a heightened mobilization of constituencies on the basis of ethnicity and religion could also become a reality even before the 2019 election if the ailing President Buhari were to die in office.

## External Links - WWL 2019: Persecution Dynamics

- Persecution engines: detailed Focus Nigeria reports  
<http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports>
- Persecution engines: Global Security (February 2016)  
<https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/para/nigerian-organized-crime.htm>
- Context: inauguration speech  
<https://guardian.ng/features/president-muhammadu-buharis-inaugural-speech/>
- Context: Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria  
<http://theanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Ethnic-cleansing-in-the-Middle-Belt-Region-of-Nigeria-2015.pdf>
- Context: vicious circle of violence in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria  
<http://theanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/Migration-and-Violent-Conflict-in-Divided-Societies-March-2015.pdf>
- Context: deaths of thousands of Christians  
<http://theanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Nigeria-Benue-State-2017-WWR.pdf>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: forced marriage  
<https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2016/11/child-marriage-becoming-a-cloud-of-crisis-n-nigerian-christian-leaders-warn-president/>
- Pressure in the 5 spheres of life and violence: Boko Haram  
<http://www.christianpost.com/news/christians-victimized-by-boko-haram-denied-food-aid-in-nigerian-displacement-camps-178466/>
- Gender specific persecution: Our Bodies, Their Battleground  
<http://theanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Boko-Haram-and-Gender-Based-Violence-against-Christian-Women-and-Children-in-North-Eastern-Nigeria-since-1999-2015.pdf>
- Future outlook: 3rd  
<http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2018/12/Global-Terrorism-Index-2018-1.pdf>
- Future outlook: ethnic cleansing as outlined by WWR  
<http://theanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Ethnic-cleansing-in-the-Middle-Belt-Region-of-Nigeria-2015.pdf>

## Additional Reports and Articles

### WWR in-depth reports

A selection of in-depth reports is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports/> (password: freedom).

### Open Doors article(s) from the region

A selection of articles is available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/articles/> (password freedom).

### World Watch Monitor news articles

Use the country search function at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/>

### Recent country developments

Use the country search function at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/> (password: freedom).