

World
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Nigeria: Country Dossier

December 2019



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Serving persecuted **Christians** worldwide

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Introduction

World Watch List 2020

Rank	Country	Private life	Family life	Community life	National life	Church life	Violence	Total Score WWL 2020	Total Score WWL 2019	Total Score WWL 2018	Total Score WWL 2017	Total Score WWL 2016
1	North Korea	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	11.1	94	94	94	92	92
2	Afghanistan	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	16.7	10.0	93	94	93	89	88
3	Somalia	16.5	16.7	16.6	16.6	16.5	9.4	92	91	91	91	87
4	Libya	15.3	15.5	15.8	16.0	16.4	11.3	90	87	86	78	79
5	Pakistan	14.0	13.9	15.0	14.9	13.7	16.7	88	87	86	88	87
6	Eritrea	14.5	14.9	15.9	15.9	15.4	10.9	87	86	86	82	89
7	Sudan	14.2	14.6	14.5	15.7	16.1	10.4	85	87	87	87	84
8	Yemen	16.6	16.4	16.4	16.7	16.7	2.6	85	86	85	85	78
9	Iran	14.1	14.3	14.1	15.8	16.5	10.4	85	85	85	85	83
10	India	12.9	13.0	13.5	15.0	13.5	14.8	83	83	81	73	68
11	Syria	13.5	14.2	13.0	13.9	14.4	12.6	82	82	76	86	87
12	Nigeria	12.2	11.9	13.5	12.8	13.0	16.7	80	80	77	78	78
13	Saudi Arabia	15.1	14.9	14.1	15.5	16.5	2.4	79	77	79	76	76
14	Maldives	15.4	15.6	14.0	15.9	16.6	0.7	78	78	78	76	76
15	Iraq	14.0	14.6	13.9	14.5	13.6	5.6	76	79	86	86	90
16	Egypt	12.1	13.1	10.7	13.2	10.5	16.1	76	76	70	65	64
17	Algeria	13.5	14.3	10.4	12.8	13.2	9.3	73	70	58	58	56
18	Uzbekistan	15.1	12.9	14.1	12.2	15.7	3.0	73	74	73	71	70
19	Myanmar	11.8	11.9	13.5	12.5	12.2	10.7	73	71	65	62	62
20	Laos	12.8	9.9	14.1	14.4	14.9	5.6	72	71	67	64	58
21	Vietnam	12.3	8.5	12.9	13.6	14.5	9.8	72	70	69	71	66
22	Turkmenistan	14.5	11.2	13.8	13.3	15.7	1.9	70	69	68	67	66
23	China	11.6	8.4	11.6	12.8	15.1	10.2	70	65	57	57	57
24	Mauritania	13.9	14.0	13.0	13.7	13.4	0.2	68	67	57	55	50
25	Central African Republic	10.1	9.1	13.1	9.8	10.2	15.6	68	70	61	58	59
26	Morocco	12.4	13.3	10.8	11.7	14.1	4.1	66	63	51	49	47
27	Qatar	13.6	13.4	10.8	12.2	14.1	2.2	66	62	63	66	65
28	Burkina Faso	9.4	9.7	10.2	9.4	11.8	15.6	66	48	-	-	-
29	Mali	9.2	8.2	12.8	10.0	11.7	13.7	66	68	59	59	55
30	Sri Lanka	11.5	9.0	11.0	10.9	9.6	13.1	65	58	57	55	53
31	Tajikistan	13.9	12.3	11.9	12.4	13.1	1.1	65	65	65	58	58
32	Nepal	12.4	10.8	9.9	12.1	12.2	7.0	64	64	64	53	53
33	Jordan	13.1	14.1	10.7	11.7	12.5	1.7	64	65	66	63	59

34	Tunisia	12.0	12.8	10.3	10.8	12.3	5.4	64	63	62	61	58
35	Kazakhstan	13.2	11.5	10.7	12.4	14.0	1.7	64	63	63	56	55
36	Turkey	12.6	11.8	10.7	13.3	11.3	3.7	63	66	62	57	55
37	Brunei	13.8	14.3	10.7	10.3	13.5	0.6	63	63	64	64	61
38	Bangladesh	11.1	9.9	12.7	11.1	8.9	9.3	63	58	58	63	57
39	Ethiopia	10.0	9.2	10.6	10.8	10.4	11.9	63	65	62	64	67
40	Malaysia	12.1	14.6	12.7	12.0	9.6	1.5	62	60	65	60	58
41	Colombia	8.9	7.8	11.9	9.8	8.9	15.0	62	58	56	53	55
42	Oman	12.7	13.1	10.0	11.5	12.7	2.0	62	59	57	53	53
43	Kuwait	13.2	13.1	9.9	11.5	13.4	0.7	62	60	61	57	56
44	Kenya	11.7	10.5	10.9	8.3	10.9	9.1	61	61	62	68	68
45	Bhutan	12.8	10.9	11.8	11.6	13.9	0.0	61	64	62	61	56
46	Russian Federation	12.2	8.3	10.7	10.4	12.1	6.9	60	60	51	46	48
47	United Arab Emirates	12.9	13.0	9.5	11.1	12.6	1.1	60	58	58	55	55
48	Cameroon	8.8	7.2	11.6	7.0	10.4	15.0	60	54	38	-	45
49	Indonesia	10.9	11.1	11.6	10.2	9.5	6.5	60	65	59	55	55
50	Niger	9.4	9.5	13.3	7.2	11.1	9.3	60	52	45	47	53
51	Palestinian Territories	12.2	13.0	9.2	10.2	11.9	3.1	60	57	60	64	62
52	Mexico	8.4	6.8	12.2	10.6	10.0	11.5	60	61	59	57	56
53	Azerbaijan	13.0	10.0	9.3	11.1	12.4	1.5	57	57	57	52	57
54	Comoros	11.7	11.5	9.1	9.9	13.9	0.9	57	56	56	56	56
55	Kyrgyzstan	12.9	10.3	11.1	9.4	11.9	1.1	57	56	54	48	46
56	Djibouti	12.3	12.3	10.3	10.0	11.2	0.2	56	56	56	57	58
57	Democratic Republic of the Congo	5.6	6.7	10.6	7.4	10.4	15.6	56	55	33	-	53
58	Chad	11.5	8.2	10.2	9.6	10.3	5.9	56	48	40	-	51
59	Bahrain	12.1	12.3	9.1	10.1	10.5	0.9	55	55	57	54	54
60	Tanzania	9.3	10.8	10.3	8.6	8.7	7.0	55	52	53	59	57
61	Cuba	9.6	5.6	9.5	11.8	12.0	3.5	52	49	49	47	42
62	Uganda	8.1	4.6	6.7	6.7	9.1	13.0	48	47	46	53	45
63	Burundi	5.1	5.8	9.7	9.2	9.6	8.7	48	43	-	-	-
64	Guinea	10.3	7.5	8.3	7.0	8.1	3.7	45	46	-	-	-
65	South Sudan	5.7	1.5	7.0	6.3	7.8	15.6	44	44	-	-	-
66	Mozambique	6.9	4.6	7.1	5.2	8.0	11.7	43	43	-	-	-
67	Gambia	8.3	8.2	8.7	8.3	8.8	1.1	43	43	-	-	-
68	Angola	6.4	3.6	7.0	8.7	10.4	6.7	43	42	-	-	-
69	Venezuela	3.8	4.4	10.6	9.3	9.5	4.8	42	41	34	-	-
70	Ivory Coast	9.8	8.6	8.2	5.5	6.6	3.5	42	43	-	-	-
71	Rwanda	5.3	4.4	6.7	7.8	10.1	7.2	42	41	-	-	-

72	Nicaragua	5.8	4.2	8.5	9.8	9.0	4.1	41	41	-	-	-
73	Togo	8.6	6.7	8.5	7.1	8.4	1.1	41	42	-	-	-

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Brief note on sources and definitions

This country report is a collation of data and analysis based around Open Doors World Watch List (WWL) and includes statistical information on world religions, Christian denominations and people groups prepared by the World Christian Database (WCD). The highlighted links in the text can be found written out in full at the conclusion of each main section under the heading “External links”. The WWL 2020 reporting period was 1 November 2018 - 31 October 2019.

The definition of persecution used in WWL analysis is: “Any hostility experienced as a result of one’s identification with Christ. This can include hostile attitudes, words and actions towards Christians”.

This broad definition includes (but is not limited to) restrictions, pressure, discrimination, opposition, disinformation, injustice, intimidation, mistreatment, marginalization, oppression, intolerance, infringement, violation, ostracism, hostilities, harassment, abuse, violence, ethnic cleansing and genocide.

The latest update of WWL Methodology including appendices can be found on the [World Watch List Documentation](#) page of the Open Doors Analytical website (password: freedom).

WWL 2020: Persecution summary / Nigeria

Brief country details

Pop 2019	Christians	Chr%
Nigeria		
200,962,000	93,791,000	46.7

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

World Watch List Nigeria	Points	WWL Rank
WWL 2020	80	12
WWL 2019	80	12
WWL 2018	77	14
WWL 2017	78	12
WWL 2016	78	12

Scores and ranks are shown above whenever the country scored 41 points or more in the WWL 2016-2020 reporting periods.

Dominant persecution engines and drivers

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

Clan and ethnic antagonism	Government officials , Ethnic group leaders, Non-Christian religious leaders, Violent religious groups
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Engines and Drivers are listed in order of strength. Only Very strong / Strong / Medium are shown here.

Brief description of persecution situation

In terms of Persecution engines, Christians suffer from a suffocating combination of *Islamic oppression, Clan and ethnic antagonism, Dictatorial paranoia* and *Organized corruption and crime*.

For many years there has been an ongoing process of enforced (or coerced) Islamization in Nigeria. Some people refer to it as the ‘Dan Fodio jihad’. Before the arrival of the British colonial administration in Nigeria, Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani radical Islamic scholar began an Islamic jihad in Gobir in 1804, and by 1808 had established the Sokoto Caliphate. He had vowed to enforce Islam through the power of the sword from the Sahara Desert in the north to the Atlantic Ocean in the south. This enforced Islamization got a serious impulse with the declaration of Sharia states in northern Nigeria (starting in 1999). Since then it has gradually developed, by violent and non-violent means.

During the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari (beginning in 2015), this process has gained unprecedented momentum. In addition to what already was happening, the government has created extra leeway by allowing a rigid atmosphere of impunity for heinous acts of violence of which many Nigerians are victims, but most particularly Christians. Most of this violence is in the north, in the form of attacks by Boko Haram, Boko Haram split-off [Islamic State in West Africa Province](#) (ISWAP), and Fulani herdsmen, but it is also spreading into the south. 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. Further, since 2015, President Buhari’s Federal Government has pursued a policy of appointing only Muslims to certain critical offices including security agencies like the army, air-force, police, Immigration service, DSS, customs, Civil Defence Corps, prison service etc. The same applies increasingly for the judiciary in Nigeria.

This process of Islamization happens against the background of climate change and environmental degradation, pushing the Fulani herdsmen with their cattle southwards. The stress this is causing on herder-farmer relationships - a classical theme in the history of mankind - is manipulated by political and religious leadership to further the agenda of Islamization. Especially now that Christian youth have begun to defend themselves increasingly against the violent attacks of Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani and bandits, the narrative becomes confusing, and the risk of [persecution eclipse](#) arises (see: WWL - Discussion of key themes, October 2019, p. 13). Persecution eclipse is furthered by classifying what is happening in the country as 'sectarian violence', 'communal clashes' or 'civil unrest'. It would be more accurate to speak of regional '[ethnic cleansing](#)', with the intention to eventually cover the whole country.

Specific examples of persecution in the reporting period

- **13/2/2019 in Gusau, Zamfara State:** Bandits abducted and killed an Anglican priest from the Diocese of Sokoto, His wife and children were also abducted and their whereabouts are unknown.
- **29/4/2019 in Madagali, Adamawa State:** At about 5:40 pm Boko Haram fighters invaded predominantly Christian Kuda community in Madagali Local Government Area (LGA) of Adamawa State. Over 30 houses were set on fire and 23 people were killed, 20 of whom were Christians. Residents left the village to seek refuge in Gulak and other relatively safer parts of Adamawa State.
- **8/5/2019 in Lau LGA, Taraba State.** A conflict between a Fulani herder and a Kona farmer was the trigger for attacks and reprisal acts that continued for weeks and resulted in 65 deaths (most of them Christians) and 18 burned villages (with 15 churches, two primary schools and a health centre destroyed). Security forces that were deployed in the area did not intervene; on the contrary, in June 2019 many Kona youth were arrested during protests against the violence and inaction of the local authorities.
- **28/09/2019 in Riyom, Plateau State.** Three Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) were killed by gunmen. Their community had been destroyed by Fulani herdsmen in 2018, and they were still being hosted in other communities. However, the villagers, who wanted to return to their own village, had started to rebuild their houses. For weeks a group of young men would guard their properties at night and monitor security in the area. Three of them were ambushed.
- **3/10/2019 in Chikun, Kaduna State.** Fulani speaking gunmen kidnapped six school girls and 2 teachers of Engravers College Kakau, a Christian-run high school. The abductors stormed the boarding school around midnight when most of the students and teachers were asleep. They have been released, after ransom was paid. In the last few years, armed groups have perpetrated countless abductions along the Kaduna-Abuja highway for ransom, and in the process killed some of their victims. But this is the first time a school was involved.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution summary

- Brief description of persecution situation: Islamic State in West Africa Province - <http://studies.aljazeera.net/en/reports/2016/10/split-isis-aligned-boko-haram-group-161027113247008.html>
- Brief description of persecution situation: persecution eclipse - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/WWL-Discussion-of-key-themes-October-2019.pdf>
- Brief description of persecution situation: 'ethnic cleansing' - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Ethnic-cleansing-in-the-Middle-Belt-Region-of-Nigeria-2015.pdf>

WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Nigeria

Introduction

Link for general background information

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

Recent history

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

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria went through a series of civilian administrations which were overthrown by the army. After sixteen years of military rule by four different generals, in which transition to democracy and civilian rule were continually postponed, the Fourth Republic was inaugurated with a new constitution in 1999. The transition that had eluded Nigeria for more than a decade and half was made possible partly due to the sudden death of the military dictator General Sani Abacha. Upon his death, his successor, General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar, oversaw a quick transition to civilian rule and promulgated a new constitution.

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 election 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 northeastern part of the country (together with split-off group ISWAP). Raids against predominantly Christian farmers in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria by Muslim Hausa-Fulani herdsmen has also become a very serious problem. These raids are now even extending into several southern states. Road block killings and abductions have added to the deadly mix of violence against Nigerians, which affect Christians in the country disproportionately.

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 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 revenue derived from the country's considerable oil resources. Corruption is rampant and a serious problem in Nigeria both at national and federal level.

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

General elections were held in Nigeria on 23 February 2019 to elect the president, vice-president, House of Representatives and the Senate. Incumbent President Buhari won his re-election bid, defeating his closest rival, businessman Atiku Abubakar, by over 3 million votes. The elections did not run smoothly. They had initially been scheduled for 16 February 2019, but the Election Commission postponed the vote by a week at 03:00hrs on the original polling day, citing logistical challenges in getting electoral materials to polling stations on time. For some Nigerians who had to travel long distances and spend scarce resources to vote, this delay made it impossible to vote. In some places, the vote was delayed until 24 February due to electoral violence. Polling in some areas was subsequently delayed until 9 March, when voting was carried out alongside gubernatorial and state assembly elections.

Just three weeks before the presidential election a southern Christian Chief Justice of the Federal Supreme Court of Nigeria was suddenly removed and replaced with a northern Muslim Sharia judge. The question is whether he was removed to pave the way for a Muslim replacement to validate the election, or because of corruption. A country analyst states: "In as much as we don't like the way the former Chief Justice was treated, the allegation of corruption levelled against him was an issue." Whatever the reason, the new Muslim Chief Justice dismissed the appeal challenging the re-election of President Buhari. On 25 November 2019, the Chief Justice of Nigeria made a public statement published in Nigerian newspapers to the effect that Muslims can now use their numerical strength in the judiciary and legislature to amend the Constitution and extend the remit of Sharia law. This has drawn intense criticism from secular and Christian commentators. On 12 December 2019, the Chief Justice of Nigeria asked that Sharia be taught in Arabic in Nigeria's universities, confirming the subtle Islamization being pursued in the country - this time openly promoted by top government appointees.

Religious landscape

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

Religious Context: Nigeria	Numbers	%
Christians	93,791,000	46.7
Muslim	92,691,000	46.1
Hindu	35,700	0.0
Buddhist	10,500	0.0
Ethnoreligionist	13,801,000	6.9
Jewish	1,200	0.0
Bahai	47,200	0.0
Atheist	52,400	0.0
Agnostic	507,000	0.3
Other	25,600	0.0

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019). OTHER includes Chinese folk, New religionist, Sikh, Spiritist, Taoist, Confucianist, Jain, Shintoist, Zoroastrian.

Religion plays a pivotal role in Nigerian society. According to WCD 2019 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 the Muslim population and discriminating against Christians. Since 1999, Sharia law has been imposed in 12 northern states much to the resentment of Christians, causing a very high level of concern. Also, in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, 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.

Although there is a religious fault-line between northern and southern Nigeria, the situation is not as clear-cut as it seems. There are many Christians in the North and Middle Belt, and many Muslims in the South:

- The 12 northern Sharia states (Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe, Zamfara) have 11.399.000 Christians (15%) out of a population of 76.390.000.
- The 7 Middle Belt states (Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba) have 14.645.000 Christians (50%) out of a population of 29.312.000.

- The 17 southern states (Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Rivers) have 65.828.000 Christians (71%) out of a population of 93.249.000.
- The Abuja FCT has a Christian population of 40%.

This data implies that religious and ethno-religious tensions can easily become a nation-wide issue, as is currently happening.

Economic landscape

Nigeria is a middle-income country and has the largest economy in Africa. The economy is heavily dependent on crude oil which constitutes about two-thirds of its revenue. Further, the country has a rich agricultural sector that is responsible for 18% of the GDP and almost a third of employment. Notwithstanding the above, poverty is widespread in the country; almost 80% of the population live on less than US \$2 per day. The northern part of the country is severely underdeveloped in comparison to the south. Regarding [school enrolment](#) for example, only 30% of children in the north attend school whereas in the south, school enrolment for children is 70%. (Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018 Country Report)

According to the [World Bank](#) (reporting in 2019): Between 2000 and 2014, Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) grew at an average rate of 7% per year. Following the oil price collapse in 2014-2016, combined with negative production shocks, the gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate dropped to 2.7% in 2015. In 2016 during its first recession in 25 years, the economy contracted by 1.6%. Since 2015, economic growth remains muted. Growth averaged 1.9% in 2018 and remained stable at 2% in the first half of 2019. Agricultural growth remains below potential due to continued insurgency in the Northeast and ongoing farmer-herdsmen conflicts. (Source: The World Bank in Nigeria)

Nigeria has introduced Islamic banking. A country analyst commented that the introduction of a separate banking system for Muslims is not a positive sign for peaceful co-existence. There is a feeling in Christian circles that Muslim citizens are gradually being empowered to the disadvantage of their Christian counterparts. Once you are economically disempowered, it will only be a matter of time before you will become voiceless and powerless.

Several European countries have visited Nigeria recently, expressing their active interest in economic collaboration with the country. It raises significant questions about the importance of the fact that the Nigerian government grossly neglects the duties of the state concerning human rights (freedom of religion, freedom of association and freedom of expression). It would seem that the economic interests of the West are affecting how Western governments view the crisis in Nigeria.

A country analyst said that the challenge is this: "When Christians try to tell the world that there is a religious background to all that is happening in Nigeria, it complicates the issue and many stop listening, simply denying the religious component to the current crisis in the country."

In this way, Western countries are in fact acting as Nigerian government apologists. Some of the Western dominated NGOs also pass on this same viewpoint to their home governments. According to the same country analyst, an honest diagnosis, however, reveals that there are a combination of variables which drive these attacks, namely a mixture of religious, economic, political, ethnic, environmental factors, as well as overpopulation and foreign manipulation. Religion drives and feeds these other factors more than any other component. Added to this, politicians manipulate religion and ethnicity to spread the violence, while economic interests and corruption strengthen it.

Social and cultural landscape

Despite the fact that Nigeria has made some progress in socio-economic terms in recent years, its human capital development is weak, primarily due to under-investment. The country ranked 158 with an index of 0.534, putting it in the “[low human development category](#)”. (Source: UNDP 2019) This “Human Development Index” 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. Nigeria's score is among the lowest.

The highly [unequal distribution of income](#) in Nigeria is cause and effect of Nigeria’s very low human development status. More than two-thirds of the estimated 180 million people live in absolute poverty. In addition, Nigeria has missed all the Millennium Development Goals, and the outlook for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as part of Agenda 2030 remains poor – even though enough resources exist. (Source: Bertelsmann Stiftung, BTI 2018 Country Report)

Demographic developments might shift the precarious balance in Nigeria between Muslims and Christians. The Muslim population is [growing faster](#) than the Christian population. According to a country analyst: “With a fast increasing population level, it is only a matter of time until the Muslim community will make the voting power of Christians meaningless.” The fact that the Muslim population could already use its numerical strength in the judiciary and legislature to amend the Constitution to extend the remit of Sharia law - as recently expressed by the Chief Justice of Nigeria - suggests that for some, democracy is more a ‘game of numbers’ than a means of protection for minorities.

The combination of high numbers of children and youth, a lack of education and employment and high levels of poverty is very dangerous for the future of Nigeria. It might turn the country into a 'powder keg', ready to explode. The resulting chaos and conflict is the perfect breeding ground for coercive Islamization.

Technological landscape

Nigeria has one of the biggest economies on the African continent and also has tens of millions of Internet users. According to a Nigerian website report entitled “[Global State of Digital in 2019](#)”: “Of the 98.39 million Nigerian Internet users, 54% access the Internet on a daily basis while only 12% (24 million) have active social media accounts. ... WhatsApp is the most active social media platform in the country with 85% of users. The second is Facebook at 78%, Instagram is third at 57%, followed by FB Messenger at 54% and Youtube at 53%.”

Social media has made it possible for Christians in Nigeria to be heard. Before the advent of WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, the government had control of the media and could manipulate all information published. However, it is uncertain how much longer this [freedom](#) will last. There are serious problems, when it comes to freedom of journalists and activists, for instance.

[Reporters Without Borders](#) ranks Nigeria 120 in the World Press Freedom Index (out of 180; 1 is best). It refers to the situation in Nigeria as a “climate of permanent violence” and states: “The campaign for the elections won by President Buhari in February 2019 was marked by an unprecedented level of disinformation – especially on social networks – which was spread by officials within the two main parties. The defence of quality journalism and the protection of journalists need to be priorities during President Buhari’s second term. Africa’s most populous nation has more than 100 independent newspapers and yet covering stories involving politics, terrorism or financial embezzlement by the powerful proves problematic. Journalists are often threatened, subjected to physical violence or denied access to information by government officials, police and sometimes the public itself. The all-powerful regional governors are often the most determined persecutors and act with complete impunity. In 2018, one governor had the premises of a radio station razed after a series of reports criticizing his handling of local affairs. The police also detained a journalist for several days in an attempt to identify his sources. Online freedom is restricted by a 2015 cyber-crime law that is widely used to arrest and prosecute journalists and bloggers in an arbitrary manner.”

A country analyst adds: "In recent years, the official and mainline media have been biased in favor of Muslims. Right now, the official narrative from the formal media is biased against the Christians. One strong concern we have today is that the government is not fair and would rather serve as apologist for the killers. Had there been no social media, the attacks on Christian communities would have largely gone un-reported and the killing of Christians would be ignored."

The other side is also true. Social media is also a platform for hate-speech against Christians, for instance by leaders of aggressive Islamic groups in Nigeria and in posts of sermons preached by Islamic clerics. Besides social media, there seems to be an increase in hatred even among teenagers in schools, at markets and in other public places. Christians are often portrayed as infidels and second-class citizens. The Internet and social media have heightened the barrage of attacks.

However, there is a flipside to this, which shows how complex the situation in Nigeria has become. The Bishop of Sokoto [warned](#): “The continued hate-speech against the Fulani herdsmen as being currently done on social media, constitutes a threat to the unity and peace of Nigeria". He said this in a speech held at a seminar on "Fake News and hate speech", organized by the Olusegun Obasanjo Centre for African Studies, a unit of the National Open University of Nigeria.

Security situation

Christians in Nigeria have faced some of the deadliest attacks ever perpetrated by Islamic militants. The [Global Terrorism Index 2019](#) ranked Nigeria 3rd 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 in the months to come.

- ***Boko Haram and its split-off ISWAP:*** In line with the violent traditions of the Maitatsine riots of the 1980s and the Sharia implementation of 1999, Christians in northern Nigeria have increasingly become targets for jihadist attacks. Building on this, Boko Haram has, for the past few years, carried out a systematic campaign against the Nigerian state, specifically targeting Christians in its ideology, rhetoric and actions with the intent of establishing an Islamic state. Using the rhetoric of radical Islam, it declared an Islamic caliphate in Gwoza, Borno State, in August 2014. The expansion of this caliphate 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.

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

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

- ***Hausa-Fulani-herdsmen/militia:*** Violence is also being perpetrated by Islamic assailants commonly identified as Fulani herdsmen, who descend on predominantly Christian villages in the Middle Belt region attacking innocent people, including women and children. They leave a trail of killing, rape and destruction. This violence against Christian-majority ethnic communities across Nigeria's central area is expanding into communities that had been thought to be safe, such as in Plateau State and even further south. 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).

- **Unidentified gunmen (Bandits / Kidnappers):** Apart from Boko Haram and ISWAP, a third group of violent aggressors has become increasingly active. The UN High Commission for Refugees reports that violence spreading from the north-east to north-west and the Middle Belt is due to a range of armed and criminal groups that continue to rampage through communities – killing, raping, plundering, burning and kidnapping for ransom (including the abduction of girls as young as 10 years of age). Victims say that they are frequently told “Convert or be killed!”. This would seem to confirm the impression held by some that at least part of those gangs are Fulani too. However, as stated by a country analyst, "not all Fulanis are kidnappers and not all kidnappers in Nigeria are Fulanis. The kidnapping business had been going on in the southern part of Nigeria before the Fulanis joined them in the kidnapping business and extended it to the north."
- **Systemic corruption:** Corruption is a major concern in Nigeria. It does not have a religious face. Both Muslims and Christians are involved and both are experts in promoting systemic corruption and subverting anti-corruption efforts.

A country analyst remarked that the thing which brings religion into the equation, is the selective nature of the prosecutions and convictions of public officers on grounds of corruption. Of the several Governors who served between 1999 and 2007, so far only three Governors have been convicted of corruption charges and all three are Christians. (A fourth was given a prison sentence in the UK.) It is remarkable that no single Muslim Governor has been prosecuted and convicted to date.

The violent attacks on Christians and Christian communities are largely ‘fall-out’ from this systemic corruption and are kept on-going through the emergence of a ‘conflict industry’, which in turn is sustained by a culture of impunity.

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

Systemic corruption in Nigeria is manifested in the absence of the rule of law and the failure of the State as a duty-bearer to respect, protect and fulfill the human rights of citizens to security, public service delivery and democratic dividends. Resources meant for these purposes are diverted to private interests and Christians have also been involved or looked the other way.

Nepotism based on ethnic, religious, or party affiliation is rife; over 85% of security sector leaders are Muslims from the core north in violation of the Federal Character principle of the amended 1999 Constitution. Due to ethnic and party fragmentation and personal interests, Christians have been unable or unwilling to muster a common front to combat systemic corruption. This makes them complicit in their own persecution.

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

A country analyst summarized the interplay of the above-mentioned four critical threats to security in Nigeria as follows: "A climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption is being created to further the Islamization agenda."

Trends analysis

1) Nigeria has been weakened by a complex combination of deep-rooted issues

One of the most complex and corrupt nations in West Africa, Nigeria has been struggling with deep-rooted issues. Due to its size and human and natural resources, it has the potential to be a strong force on the continent. However, the political instability, insecurity and rampant corruption that have characterized the country for decades and still persist, have weakened it considerably. Regional, ethnic and religious tensions and competition among politicians exacerbate the problem. The extent to which these issues are addressed will determine whether or not Nigeria will be able to realize its potential and become a prosperous and stable country. However, the current trends in the country seem to indicate that Nigeria will continue to be a country struggling to stay afloat.

2) The government has not produced working solutions to the security crisis

The rise of Boko Haram in the last decade has made the situation even more complex. Since President Buhari came to power, military offensives 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. ISWAP added to the spectrum of violent Islamic groups. There are also numerous attacks by Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt regions, even spreading towards southern states, 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 if the international community intervenes with humanitarian (and other forms of) aid, and puts pressure on the Nigerian government to come up with a comprehensive policy to address this complex and deadly situation. As long as this is not the case, official visits and trade delegations to Nigeria must be postponed or clearly put in this framework.

3) Christians have allegedly begun to organize their own defense

Christians are allegedly increasingly organizing their own defense, although they can hardly match the types and amounts of weapons their adversaries are using. Having said that, much of Christianity in Nigeria is still not willing to respond with violence. However, certain Christian young men who see their mothers and sisters raped and their fathers and brothers killed, will likely increasingly try to arm themselves and defend their families and villages. This is a very risky situation, because apart from the concept of 'just war', it can easily lead to disproportional retaliation on Fulani villagers and other Muslims, as well as lead to outright banditry when 'just war' and 'lust for personal gain' get confused. Finally, this is a war those Christian young men can never win. Boko Haram, ISWAP and the Fulani herdsmen, including other unidentified gunmen, possess types and quantities of weapons that raise questions about their origin. One of the sources might be [Turkey](#), as has been recently suggested. The chaos created by such a situation, under the passively watching eye of an inactive government, reinforces the suspicion expressed above: "A climate of impunity, anarchy and corruption is being created to further the Islamization agenda."

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

If in the near or distant future Nigeria emerges out of the current chaos as an Islamized nation, built upon the influence wielded by violent Islamic militancy, Nigeria will become a strongly destabilizing power for the [entire region](#), if not the whole African continent, and maybe even beyond. A similar scenario confronted the international community when the Islamic State group conquered parts of Syria and Iraq; however, the Nigerian scenario is being neglected.

External Links - WWL 2020: Keys to understanding / Nigeria

- Link for general background information: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550>. - <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13949550>
- Economic landscape: school enrolment - <https://www.bti-project.org/de/berichte/laenderberichte/detail/itc/nga/ity/2018/itr/wca/>
- Economic landscape: World Bank - <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/nigeria/overview>
- Social and cultural landscape: "low human development category" - http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/hdr_2019_overview_-_english.pdf
- Social and cultural landscape: unequal distribution of income - <https://www.bti-project.org/de/berichte/laenderberichte/detail/itc/nga/ity/2018/itr/wca/>
- Social and cultural landscape: growing faster - <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/04/06/why-muslims-are-the-worlds-fastest-growing-religious-group/>
- Technological landscape: Global State of Digital in 2019 - <https://www.pulse.ng/bi/tech/how-nigerians-are-using-the-internet-in-2019/kz097rg>

- Technological landscape: freedom - <https://www.freedomonthenet.org/report/freedom-on-the-net/2019/the-crisis-of-social-media>
- Technological landscape: Reporters Without Borders - <https://rsf.org/en/nigeria?nl=ok>
- Technological landscape: warned - http://fides.org/en/news/66440-AFRICA_NIGERIA_Stop_inciting_hatred_against_the_Fulani_that_could_lead_to_a_civil_war_and_genocide_warns_Mgr_Kukah
- Security situation: Global Terrorism Index 2019 - <http://visionofhumanity.org/app/uploads/2019/11/GTI-2019web.pdf>
- Security situation: detailed Focus Nigeria reports - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/reports>
- Trends analysis: Turkey - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbU90UMqCl8>
- Trends analysis: entire region - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Africa-Mapping-Islamic-militancy-July-2019-FINAL.pdf>

WWL 2020: Church information / Nigeria

Christian origins

African traditional religions were dominant in the southern part of the country before European missionaries introduced Christianity. The first Christian mission that reached Nigeria was during the Portuguese dominance of the Atlantic Coast in the 15th and 16th centuries. However, during that period, the [Portuguese Catholics](#) gave priority to economic and political activities, as a result of which Christian mission made no headway and most parts of the country continued to follow traditional African religions. 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. Part of this might be attributed to the fact that northern Nigeria was placed under indirect rule, and Christian missions were not allowed to operate freely there.

Church spectrum today

Church networks: Nigeria	Christians	%
Orthodox	3,000	0.0
Catholic	24,555,000	26.2
Protestant	60,964,000	65.0
Independent	27,913,000	29.8
Unaffiliated	147,000	0.2

Doubly-affiliated Christians	-19,791,000	-21.1
Total	93,791,000	100.0
<i>(Any deviation from the total number of Christians stated above is due to the rounding of decimals)</i>		
Evangelical movement	44,229,000	47.2
Renewalist movement	58,090,000	61.9

Data source: Johnson T M and Zurlo G A, eds., *World Christian Database* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, accessed April 2019).

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.

External Links - WWL 2020: Church information

- Christian origins: Portuguese Catholics - <http://www.waado.org/UrhoboCulture/Religion/Erivwo/HistoryOfChristianity/ChapterOne.html>
- Christian origins: Samuel Adjai Crowther - http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/crowther5_samuel.html

WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics / Nigeria

Reporting period

1 November 2018 – 31 October 2019

Position on World Watch List (WWL)

With a score of 80 points, Nigeria ranks 12 in WWL 2020.

In WWL 2019, Nigeria also ranked 12, with a score of 80. The score for average pressure remained 12.7 points, reflecting in particular the very high pressure on Christians living in predominantly Muslim communities in the north. The score for violence also stayed the same with 16.7 points, the maximum possible. Violence against Christians perpetrated by Boko Haram, ISWAP and Fulani herdsmen, as well as by ‘unidentified gunmen’, has caused tremendous suffering among Christians in the northern parts of the country as well in the Middle Belt, spreading even to southern states.

Persecution engines

Persecution engines: Nigeria	Abbreviation	Level of influence
Islamic oppression	IO	Very strong
Religious nationalism	RN	Not at all
Clan and ethnic antagonism	CEA	Strong
Christian denominational protectionism	CDP	Not at all
Communist and post - Communist oppression	CPCO	Not at all
Secular intolerance	SI	Not at all
Dictatorial paranoia	DPA	Very strong
Organized corruption and crime	OCC	Very strong

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

The persecution situation in Nigeria is a blend of 4 (very) strong Persecution engines:

- **Islamic oppression,**
- **Dictatorial paranoia,**
- **Organized corruption and crime**
- **Clan and ethnic antagonism**

The guiding principle and goal behind this blend of engines is: **Islamization at all costs**. In the northern states, Sharia law keeps Christians increasingly in a position of being second-class citizens. The information provided below in the section “Pressure in the 5 spheres of life” draws much on what happens in the northern states, and to a lesser degree in the Muslim-dominated areas in the Middle Belt states of Nigeria. Traditional leaders often combine their office with Islamic leadership.

In the case of Nigeria the Islamization process is being strongly pushed by three ethnic groups in a sort of coalition: Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri. Although some of their group members have converted to Christianity, they are strongly attached to a political Islamic agenda. As a country analyst stated: "Those effectively in control of Nigeria today politically are from these ethnic groups." When asked about the risk of ethnic conflict, he answered: "I dare say the others [outside this coalition] are just watching. If the Fulani, Hausa and Kanuri go too far, it might just lead to war. I fear we might be moving in this direction if things continue this way as many are feeling excluded."

In the northeast, violence committed in the name of Islam by Boko Haram and ISWAP against civilians, and especially against Christians, is still rampant. The same applies for violence committed by the Fulani herders in the Middle Belt states and several southern states (among them Edo, Delta, Enugu, Anambra, Ekiti and Osun). Added to this there is the violence committed by the unidentified gunmen. Their battle-cry "Convert or be killed!" suggests that part of them are also linked to the agenda of coercive Islamization. The information provided above in the section "Security situation" further explains this dynamic.

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

As suggested in the conclusion of the section entitled "Trends analysis" above, if the current developments in Nigeria (which are a dangerous blend of four Persecution engines) are extrapolated into the future, a situation of such chaos might emerge that it will no longer be possible to distinguish good actors from bad. Ultimately, such chaos would give rise to a new Nigeria that is born out of violent Islamic militancy and will come to adulthood accordingly.

Drivers of persecution

Drivers of Persecution: Nigeria	IO	RN	CEA	CDP	CPCO	SI	DPA	OCC
	VERY STRONG		STRONG				VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG
Government officials	Very strong		Strong				Very strong	Very strong
Ethnic group leaders	Very strong		Strong				Very strong	Strong
Non-Christian religious leaders	Very strong		Strong				Medium	Medium
Violent religious groups	Very strong		Strong				Strong	Very strong

Citizens (people from the broader society), including mobs	Strong		Weak				Weak	-
One's own (extended) family	Strong		Weak				Weak	-
Political parties	Strong		-				Very strong	Strong
Organized crime cartels or networks	Strong		-				Strong	Very strong
Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies	Medium		-				Medium	-

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

Drivers of the blend of Islamic oppression, Dictatorial paranoia, Organized corruption and crime and Clan and Ethnic antagonism:

Government officials (Very strong to Strong):

Islamization in Nigeria has increasingly become coercive under the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari. It seems that President Buhari uses his position in power to appoint Muslims to key positions in the country, and to allow (if not encourage) a culture of impunity that makes it possible for persecution against Christians to go largely unnoticed ('persecution eclipse'). The governments of the 12 Sharia states were already on the same track, but with the president now as their example, they may feel encouraged to further Islamize their states instead of guaranteeing the elementary rights of their Christian citizens (freedom of religion, freedom of association, freedom of expression).

Examples illustrating the above: The Federal government has removed Christians from various positions or forced their resignation and replaced them with Muslim officials. In Zamfara State, a female Christian Acting Chief Judge was forced out of office instead of confirmed. This had also happened in Kano State previously. In Kano, the predominant Hausa ethnic group is working aggressively to Islamize the minority Magurzawa tribe, including budgeting government money for their conversion. The government has built mosques in all the Local Government Areas but has confiscated church property, denied land permits and denied rebuilding rights to churches destroyed by Muslims. It even goes as far as positioning Christian soldiers in dangerous battle positions. A country analyst states that the numbers of "soldiers and officers killed in battle with terrorists are 75% non-Muslims based on our interface with families of the bereaved."

Ethnic group leaders (Very strong to Strong):

Ethnic group leaders as drivers of persecution have two dimensions: One is if and how they drive persecution when group members convert to Christianity from the generally held religion (Traditional Religion (ATR); Islam).

The other is if and how they drive persecution between ethnic groups with different religions. In the case of Nigeria both roles are important, especially in the context of Islam. The predominantly Muslim Hausa-Fulani ethnic nationality in Nigeria is central to past and ongoing persecution of Christians, particularly in the North.

In the past, when African Traditional Religion (ATR) was dominant, the persecution of Christian converts by adherents of ATR was common, but persecution in this context has gradually reduced and comes now primarily from the Muslim Hausa-Fulani group (together with the Kanuris). Unlike the south of Nigeria which has ethnic tribal chiefs, most northern tribes have religious rulers or emirs instead. Many of them subscribe to the agenda of further Islamization of their ethnic groups and beyond.

Examples illustrating the above: In Borno which has an indigenous Islamic community going back to the Kanem Bornu empire, they have a Shehu of Borno as the ethnic-religious ruler. The Fulanis who were an invading jihadist group have a Sultan of Sokoto who is an ethno-religious leader. The Sokoto Caliphate tries to enforce ethnic-based emirates across 18 states in northern Nigeria. Kaduna State has imposed emirates even on Christian communities in Southern Kaduna. According to a country analyst: "We are also witnessing a new development in which the people of Adara and other ethnic nationalities in Southern Kaduna rejected the creation of the Emirate system in their areas and the Adara took the matter to court."

Non-Christian religious leaders (very Strong to Medium):

Many non-Christian religious, particularly Muslim religious leaders have been sources of persecution of Christians at the level of religious ideology, intolerant messaging and incitement.

Violent religious groups (Very strong to Strong):

There are different groups but in the context of this dossier the most prominent ones are Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen and unidentified gunmen (bandits/kidnappers). See "Security situation" above. However the Miyetti Allah Cattle Breeders Association of Nigeria (MACBAN) deserves a mention here: Not all Fulani herders are violent militants and some even feel victimized because they are Fulani although they are not involved in violent attacks. However, the activities of MACBAN have become highly politicized in recent times because of links to powerful patrons, including the President of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto; MACBAN gives protection to Fulani herders and justification for their aggression. The President of Nigeria and the Sultan of Sokoto have continued to lend tacit support for the expansionist agenda of the Fulani militants.

MACBAN claims to represent the interest of cattle rearers all over Nigeria, but essentially, they are overtly ethnic in their composition and outlook. It is important to note that many of the Fulani herders are mere fronts for influential people who actually own the cattle. This is another complex issue. There are many non-Fulanis including Fulani Christians who own plenty of cows in Nigeria today. MACBAN does not treat them as bona fide members. MACBAN seeks to defend the course Fulani Muslims are taking, including justifying their violence against farmers.

Fulani settlers are diverse. They are not all linked to Fulani herders beyond sharing ethnic and religious identity. The herders are more likely to be animists or syncretic in their practice of Islam and traditional religion. Fulani settlers tend to be Muslims, although there are Fulani Christians as well.

Many Fulani settlers who are Muslim normally tend to work with their Hausa Muslim counterparts to suppress Christians politically, socially and economically within their domains.

Citizens (people from broader society), including mobs (Strong to Weak):

Apart from the hostility from state and organized non-state actors, another source of drivers of persecution is the "street" violence where Muslims in the community riot and attack Christians for flimsy reasons or false accusations of blasphemy in northern Nigeria. This occurs mostly in the context of the persecution engine *Islamic oppression*. A Muslim southerner who grew up in the North recently said that northern Muslims would borrow money from her and promise to repay her during the "next riot." This anecdotal evidence shows that these attacks are not spontaneous but sometimes premeditated as a means of looting the infidels. Christians have been losing property, churches and lives in the recurring violence for decades.

One's own (extended) family (Strong to Weak):

In the context of conversion from Islam to Christianity, one's own family (or extended family) is the primary threat. They are often the first to know, and depending on their standing in the community, may be the first to want to protect their family honor. This is especially the case in the northern states (including the Muslim majority part of the Middle Belt) where Islam has become an all-embracing attribute of identity, or where the Islamic religious identity has become politicized (not only because of what is happening in those states themselves but also increasingly fueled by developments at national level under the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari.)

Political parties (Strong to Very strong):

The two main political parties in Nigeria are divided along religious lines. These religious divisions are based not so much on ideology as on religious sentiment. The Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) is perceived to be sympathetic towards Christians. The All Progressive Congress (APC) on the other hand is seen by the Nigerian public to be pro-Islam. Nigeria's current ruling party (APC) is actually an alliance between Muslims in the north and the south. This is reflected in its approach towards governance and policies that are inherently pro-Islam and anti-Christian.

Organized crime cartels or networks (Strong to Very strong):

Drivers of the Persecution engine *Organized corruption and crime* can be government officials at different levels, together with other leading people from different sectors of society. This is explained in more detail in the section "Security situation" above.

Another category of drivers are criminal groups (in the context of Nigeria often partly overlapping with religious-ideological groups such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen and unidentified gunmen – also referred to as bandits or kidnappers). They are not always directly responsible for persecuting Christians; there are times when their responsibility is indirect – i.e. by contributing to a potential escalation of chaos that leads to persecution eclipse, thus adding to the increasing power of coercive Islamization.

Multilateral organizations (e.g. UN, OIC etc.) and embassies (Medium):

Foreign diplomatic missions can be considered partly responsible for the persecution dynamics related to the Persecution engines *Islamic oppression* and *Dictatorial paranoia*. Their refusal to accept religion as an important factor in the Nigerian conflict is incomprehensible.

A researcher who contributed to the WWL 2020 Nigeria background investigation was told by a European ambassador in 2018: "We can't call it religious" after he was briefed about the massacres of Christians in Benue State by Fulani herdsmen. The same sentiment was expressed in 2019 by US development aid officials. According to the researcher: "These Western powers push *Secular intolerance* not only in narrative but also in practice." The same researcher was also denied a role in an EU sponsored project on countering violent extremism after he had helped the project team make relevant field contacts, because he was 'Christian'. In 2018, the EU mission withdrew him from consideration for a human rights award because he facilitated a meeting with EU Human Rights parliamentarians with Christian victims of violence which was deemed 'too Christian'. In his own words: "Although the EU MPs were impressed by the meeting (which they called the most emotional meeting of their one week trip), the embassy was not happy that it exposed their watered down reports on the true situation of persecution in Nigeria."

Geographical hotspots of persecution

Persecution is strongest in the 12 northern Sharia states and the Middle Belt states. Violent attacks have been taking place in a number of southern states too (among them Edo, Delta, Enugu, Anambra, Ekiti and Osun).

The persecution situation in the 12 Sharia states can be characterized by '**submission into dhimmitude**' (the classical Islamic concept of second-class citizenship). There are however certain differences between the states. The 12 northern Sharia states are: Bauchi, Borno, Gombe, Jigawa, Kaduna, Kano, Katsina, Kebbi, Niger, Sokoto, Yobe and Zamfara. Their Christian population totals 15% (11,399,000 Christians out of a population of 76,390,000). More than direct violence, Christian face all sorts of pressure in their different spheres of life. Types of this pressure are indicated in section "Pressure in the 5 spheres of life" below.

The persecution situation in the Middle Belt states (and increasingly also in several southern states) can be characterized by '**ethnic cleansing**'. As explained in the report "[Nigeria - Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region](#)" (2015):

“Ethnic cleansing’ describes the expulsion of a competitor or those who differ in race, ethnicity or religion from a given area by employing different unlawful means, the known ones being: murder, destruction of property, torture, arbitrary arrest and detention, confinement of civilian population in ghetto areas, forcible removal, displacement and deportation of civilian population, extra-judicial executions, rape and deliberate military or other organized attacks, or threats of attacks, on civilians or even genocide.”

The 7 Middle Belt states are Adamawa, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nassarawa, Plateau, and Taraba. Their Christian population totals 50% (14,645,000 Christians out of a population of 29,312,000). Although pressure in the different spheres of life plays a significant role too, especially in Muslim majority areas in the Middle Belt, persecution in these states is mainly characterized by the acts of violence committed by the different religious-ideological and criminal groups.

‘Ethnic cleansing’ also applies to the northeastern states to Boko Haram’s operations (in southern Borno State and northern Adamawa State which borders Cameroon), and more recently also to the operations of ISWAP (in northern Borno State close to the border with Chad) which split off from Boko Haram in 2016.

‘Ethnic cleansing’ leads to large numbers of Christians (and also other Nigerians) being forced to live in formal or informal IDP camps and causes loss of family grounds and property and hence loss of future well-being. This situation is aggravated by the fact that the Nigerian government hardly does anything to assist these IDPs, and allows the situation that has created the crisis to continue unabatedly.

In a way, the whole country is increasingly becoming a hotspot of persecution, as explained in different sections of this dossier. Coercive Islamization under President Buhari is getting such a boost, that one wonders how long it will be before the conditions prevalent in the northern Sharia states and states of the Middle Belt will reproduce themselves in the southern states of Nigeria. For the record, the 17 southern states are: Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Ebonyi, Edo, Ekiti, Enugu, Imo, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Oyo, Rivers. Their Christian population totals 71% (65,828,000 Christians out of a population of 93,249,000). The Abuja FCT has a Christian population of 40%.

Christian communities and how they are affected

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

Historical Christian communities: In Nigeria these include the Roman Catholic Church and Protestant denominations such as Anglicans, Methodists and Lutherans.

As explained in various sections of this country dossier, these churches face violent attacks against their life and property perpetrated by militant groups and discrimination from the local authorities, especially in the northern states (and also the Middle Belt). In the context of the violence committed by different religious-ideological and criminal groups in the northern part of the country (also in the Middle Belt), it was thought that the number of Christians would decrease. There are, however, indications that the Christian population may be growing despite this violence.

In-country research has shown that, in the midst of the conflict, Roman Catholics are creating more dioceses and Protestant Christianity is also growing faster than might have been expected.

Converts to Christianity: These are mostly converts from Islam to Christianity. They usually find refuge in safe locations, often fearing for their life. Muslim converts to Christianity from northern Nigeria (including the Muslim-majority areas in the Middle Belt) often have to flee their homes and states to escape being killed or harassed. This is far less likely to occur in the south although it happens to a limited degree in the South West.

Non-traditional Christian communities: The Evangelical and Pentecostal communities now constitute about 30% of the Nigerian Church. Most are located in southern Nigeria. As is the case for the historical Christian communities, in the northern states (including the Middle Belt) the Evangelical and Pentecostal communities face discrimination from the local authorities, as well as violent attacks against their life and property by militant groups. Their fate and that of the historical Christian communities are comparable. Some of them are very active in evangelism, and go where it is really dangerous to go, which normally increases the chances of severe violent persecution. Notwithstanding this violence, the number of Evangelical and Pentecostal communities is increasing in Nigeria.

The Persecution pattern



The WWL 2020 persecution pattern for Nigeria shows:

- The average pressure on Christians in Nigeria is very high at a level of 12.7 points, the same as in WWL 2019.
- All *spheres of life* score above 11 points out of the maximum of 16.7, showing that pressure is at a very high level throughout. Pressure is highest in the *community sphere* (13.4 points).

- The score for violence is the maximum achievable score (16.7 points), the same as in WWL 2019.

Pressure in the 5 spheres of life

In each of the five spheres of life discussed below, details from four of the highest scoring block questions have been selected (in most cases this will be questions which have scored 3.5 or above on a scale 0 – maximum 4 in the WWL questionnaire), with those items scoring highest listed first. In some cases, an additional paragraph per sphere is included to give further information deemed important. (To see how individual questions are scored, please see the “WWL Scoring example” in the WWL Methodology, available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/world-watch-list-documentation/>, password: freedom).

Private sphere:

- ***Conversion has been opposed, forbidden, or punishable, (including conversion from one denomination to another) (Block 1.1 / 3 points):*** Converts to Christianity from Islam in northern Nigeria (including parts of the Middle Belt) often have to flee their homes and states to escape being killed or harassed. They are usually finding assistance in ‘safe houses’. Such opposition is far less likely to occur in the south, although it happens to a limited degree in the South West.
- ***It has been dangerous to privately own or keep Christian materials (Block 1.3 / 3 points):*** It is dangerous for converts to Christianity from Islam, in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt); they fear being discovered by their families or local communities.
- ***It has been risky for Christians to display Christian images or symbols? (Block 1.5 / 3 points):*** In the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt), any open identification of being a Christian is dangerous for Muslim converts. For other Christians, it is also dangerous during attacks. Christians are easily detected by their Christian names. One’s ID is regularly the passport to life or death at road blocks set up by violent Islamic groups (including unidentified gunmen).
- ***It has been risky for Christians to speak about their faith with immediate family members (Block 1.7 / 3 points):*** In the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) it is a serious risk for converts from Islamic background to share their faith with their Muslim family, because it reveals one’s new religious status.

Family sphere:

- ***Children of Christians have been harassed or discriminated against because of their parents’ faith (Block 2.9 / 3.25 points):*** It happens in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt). As described by a country analyst: “In public schools, offices, hospitals etc. there is pervasive discrimination of Christians even just from having biblical or English names.” Another analyst phrased it this way: “In every sphere of life Christian children are maltreated in Sharia states. They are treated as second class citizens in the fathers’ land, the idea is to frustrate their effort and make them have low self esteem.”

- ***Christian spouses and/or children of Christians have been subject to separation for prolonged periods of time by circumstances relating to persecution (Block 2.10 / 3.25 points):*** In the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) this happens a lot. First, the violence committed by Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen and unidentified gunmen against Christians and Christian communities, caused many Christians to be separated from their loved ones. Many have lost everything they labored for and are forced to leave their families either in an IDP camp or other safer places and they go to cities and other villages to work on farms or carry out menial jobs to fend for their families. Or they have been forced to resettle their families in other parts of the country while they remain in the risky regions to keep their jobs. Secondly, parents are sometimes abducted, and other times children have been separated from their parents by abduction. Leah Sharibu is an example, representing many children that have been taken away from their parents for a prolonged period of time by militants. This also happens frequently in a non-militant context in the north, particularly the abduction, forced conversion and forced marriage of Christian girls. There are even cases of Christian girls who have been abducted from the south and married off in the north.
- ***Parents have been hindered in raising their children according to their Christian beliefs (Block 2.7 / 3 points):*** This is especially the case in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt). Different situations define this hindrance. First, for converts it is really difficult due to the fear of discovery in their families and beyond. Added to that, if the conversion of a parent from Islam to Christianity is discovered, often their children are taken away from them, or they have to flee and lose contact with their children. Secondly, when Christian women are widowed, Muslim relatives sometimes take the children to turn them into Muslims. This might happen even after widowed mothers had raised them as Christians for years. Thirdly, sometimes parents have to hide the Christian identity of their children to avoid persecution. Fourthly, many parents have to raise their children in IDP camps. Especially when the camps are shared with Muslim IDPs, it can be made difficult for Christian parents to train their children in Christian faith and values.
- ***Christian children have been pressured into attending anti-Christian or majority religion teaching at any level of education (Block 2.8 / 3 points):*** In the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) Christian children may be forced to attend classes in Islamic Religious Knowledge. Christian Religious Knowledge is not taught in some of the core northern states. The Association of Christian Schools in Nigeria, the Nigerian Christian Graduate Fellowship and the Christian Association of Nigeria have had to work together to block the implementation of the national curriculum in schools which excluded the teaching of Christians religious studies while making that of Islam and Arabic compulsory.

Community sphere:

- ***Christians have been under threat of abduction and/or forced marriage (Block 3.3 / 3.75 points):*** The desire to depopulate Christianity and populate Islam ('ethnic cleansing') has brought about an increase in abduction and forced marriage of Christian girls and even married Christian women are sometimes targets. A country analyst said that cases of abduction for forced marriages are sometimes carried out with the active connivance of ruling emirs.

Abduction and/or forced marriage not only happen in the north eastern part of the country (for instance in Boko Haram or ISWAP operations), but also in other parts of northern Nigeria (including the Middle Belt) and even in some southern states (for instance in operations by Fulani herdsmen or unidentified gunmen). Church leaders have been specifically targeted in the WWL 2020 reporting period. The children of pastors are also targeted to spite their fathers and aggravate the Christian community. Finally, female converts are especially vulnerable to abduction and forced marriage.

- ***Christians have been harassed, threatened or obstructed in their daily lives for faith-related reasons (e.g. for not meeting majority religion or traditional dress codes, beard codes etc.) (Block 3.1 / 3.5 points):*** The area affected by this is bigger than just the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt), because of the threat of violence spreading to the southern states. In Muslim dominated areas and communities, Christians are harassed because of their clothing, speech and forms of worship. Some see Christians as infidels and second-class citizens. A female Christian cannot dress in certain ways when going to an office, school, hospital etc. if the state or community is dominated by (radicalizing) Muslims. Stones might be thrown by children at women and girls; they might even be arrested by the *hisbah* religious police. Even men might be detained for having an "immoral hair cut".
- ***Christians have been hindered in sharing community resources because of their faith (e.g. clean drinking water) (Block 3.4 / 3.5 points):*** Such hindrance is part of the strategy in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt). It is meant to coerce Christians into becoming Muslims if they want to benefit from the resources of the same country. There are different elements to this: First, social amenities from the government do not get to Christian communities as they ought to. They receive just a token amount. With respect to the provision of infrastructural development, more is invested in Muslim-dominated areas than in Christian-dominated ones in states where Christians and Muslims are almost an equal 50-50 percentage. Some Christian communities in rural areas have been completely denied water and have to trek for hours to fetch water. Even in cities, the Christian quarters are sometimes denied amenities such as sanitation services. Secondly, there are many Christian IDPs in the north (including the Middle Belt). However, the Nigerian relief agency is biased when it comes to the distribution of relief items and Christians are often left out. It is also known not to respond swiftly when the emergencies involve Christians. Even when they do respond, the items they bring are [grossly inadequate](#). Thirdly, land which is a highly valuable resource in Nigeria, is denied to converts.
- ***Christians have faced disadvantages in their education at any level for faith-related reasons (e.g. restrictions of access to education) (Block 3.9 / 3.5 points):*** In the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) Christians are often discriminated in their educational pursuits. Most especially when you bear Christian names, such as Esther, Grace, David, Solomon, or any tribal names, it makes it increasingly difficult to access education. Christian or ethnic minorities in predominantly Muslim areas are often denied admission to schools and where they are admitted, they are not given their desired professional courses.

A country analyst said he had interacted with university and college students who complained that they are not studying what they wanted to because once their names appear as Christian names, they are automatically excluded in getting admission to study courses in medicine, for example. Christians have had to change their names to Muslim names to be admitted. Results and certificates can be withheld for years to frustrate Christians. Another analyst made the connection between persecution and migration: “Many young Christians are frustrated as they cannot get admission into universities and they cannot get jobs. So they are forced to leave the country in search of opportunities to better their lot in life.”

National sphere:

- ***Those who caused harm to Christians have deliberately been left unpunished (Block 4.14 / 4 points):*** A country analyst affirmed: “One of the reasons why attacks on Christians and their properties keep increasing is because the perpetrators are not brought to book. When attackers were arrested, they were often quickly released.” He considers this as an indication that either the government is uncaring or supports those committing crimes against Christians. Another analyst stated, that most aggressors are covered by people in government positions of authority which makes them untouchable. The perpetrators of attacks against Christians are usually never arrested.
- ***The Constitution (or comparable national or state law) limits freedom of religion as formulated in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Block 4.1 / 3.5 points):*** The Nigerian Constitution provides for freedom of religion. Section 10 of the 1999 constitution prohibits the adoption of a state religion. Section 15 provides that discrimination on the grounds of place of origin, sex, religion, status, ethnic or linguistic association ties shall be prohibited. However, the adoption of the Sharia legal system by the northern states places Sharia law above of the Constitution and its operation negatively impacts Christians.
- ***Media reporting has been incorrect or biased against Christians (Block 4.10 / 3.5 points):*** This is a major problem in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) but stretches out over the whole country. Attacks on Christian communities are often reported as ‘communal clashes’. In the case of reprisal attacks, Christians are often portrayed as the initiators. Media reporting by government and Muslim-owned media outfits deliberately distort and under-report persecution and attacks against Christians by Muslims. Sometimes reports are doctored by the government first and then presented in the media.

According to one country expert, Western media are the most egregious offenders of systematically misreporting the persecution of Christians. The Nigerian government is investing massively in campaigns to influence international media. As another country analyst put it: “Muslims also offer their strong narrative over the years. It has never served them well to acknowledge the persecution of Christians because they do not wish to be seen as the aggressors. In fact they prefer to present themselves not as aggressors but as victims, yet the reality on ground says it all.”

- **Christians accused in court have been deprived of equal treatment (Block 4.15 / 3.5 points):** The local courts in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt) are channels for oppressing Christians. There is gross inequality in administration of justice, the majority of judges being Muslims in a radicalizing Islamic environment. Should there be an issue between a Christian and a Muslim, the Muslim knows he will most often be favored. Christians have served prison sentences for crimes which a Muslim is easily discharged for or is not even charged for in the first place. At times Christians are even charged in Sharia courts which have no jurisdiction over them. Their evidence is worth half of that of a Muslim.

Church sphere:

- **The activities of churches have been monitored, hindered, disturbed, or obstructed (Block 5.1 / 3.5 points):** This happens in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt). First, the activities of churches have been disrupted by constant attacks and by the destruction of church-buildings and executions or abductions of pastors and Christians in general. If a church does what some powerful Muslims do not like, it will only be a matter of time before the church could be set ablaze. Secondly, the activities of churches are monitored, obstructed or hindered from time to time; church activities are often not carried out due to the high level of insecurity; sometimes the security men deployed by the authorities to protect Christian worshippers cannot be trusted and may act as informers and/or not give protection. Thirdly, in several of the northern state Christians are denied access to land for building churches.
- **Churches have been hindered from openly integrating converts (Block 5.7 / 3.5 points):** In the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt), openly integrating Muslim converts could provoke violence against the church and its properties. Many of the converts from Islam to Christianity have to be taken to safe locations elsewhere in Nigeria due to the risk of being attacked.
- **Pastors or other Christian leaders (or their family members) have been special targets of harassment for faith-related reasons (Block 5.11 / 3.5 points):** This happens in the northern states (including parts of the Middle Belt), extending into several southern states. Pastors, and their family members are increasingly being targeted for attacks (e.g. for abduction or killing). In 2019, the leadership of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) released statistics of church leaders who were either abducted, killed or attacked (especially those speaking out about the persecution situation). WWR has not yet been able to obtain a copy of this data.
- **It has been risky for churches or Christian organizations to speak out against instigators of persecution (Block 5.20 / 3.5 points):** In an atmosphere of chaos, impunity and increasing coercive Islamization, speaking out against persecution of Christians is not a safe thing to do - particularly in the areas where outright violence is rife (e.g. in the northern states including parts of the Middle Belt, and several southern states). The space to advocate for justice naturally depends on the profile of the advocates for justice. People with high profile have more opportunity than people with a lower profile from within the most affected areas.

Violence

The following table is based on reported cases as much as possible. Since many incidents go unreported, the numbers below must be understood as being minimum figures. In cases where it has been impossible to count exactly, a symbolic round figure (10, 100 or 1000) is given. (A symbolic number of 10 could in reality even be 100 or more but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 100 could go well over 1000 but the real number is uncertain. A symbolic number of 1000 could go well over 10,000 but, again, the real number is uncertain.) In cases where it is clear that (many) more Christians are affected, but a concrete number could be given according to the number of incidents reported, the number given has to be understood as being an absolutely minimum figure.

Nigeria	Reporting period	Christians killed	Christians attacked	Christians arrested	Churches attacked	Christian-owned houses and shops attacked
WWL 2020	01 Nov 2018 - 31 Oct 2019	1350	1804	245	150	2500
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.

For the WWL 2020 reporting period:

- Christians killed:** The total number of Christians killed in Nigeria went down from 3,731 in WWL 2019 to 1,350 WWL 2020. There are various reasons for this fall in numbers: First, fewer killings of Christians in Nigeria were registered because the Fulani herdsmen changed tactics. Instead of mainly focusing on raiding Christian homesteads and communities, they put more emphasis on abductions (kidnappings for ransom) and road-block killings (where your ID can be your death sentence). This is also the strategy of unidentified gunmen who many believe are Fulani too (at least part of them). Secondly, the data is not complete. Although this is always the case for countries where there is persecution in the midst of chaos and conflict, WWR encountered exceptional difficulties in gathering data for the WWL 2020 reporting period.

- **Christians attacked:** The total number of Christians attacked in Nigeria stands at 1,804 for WWL 2020. In WWL 2019 it stood at 21,850. This big difference is misleading. In WWL 2020 WWR used the 'symbolic number 1000' for the number of Christians that were physically or mentally abused (including beatings and death-threats) as there were simply too many to count. It might well have been many thousands. Added to that, the number of women or girls abducted, raped or otherwise sexually harassed, or forced into marriage to non-Christians, was put at 804. Although this is a real number, it has to be understood as being an absolute minimum figure. The type of chaos and fighting going on in so many parts of the country always go together with very serious violent incidents targeting women and girls. Men and boys are also heavily affected but often in different ways. See “Gender profile of persecution” below.
- **Christians arrested:** The number of Christians arrested was 245. That went up from 116 in WWL 2019. The numbers from secret detention facilities remain unknown.
- **Christian homes/shops attacked:** The total number of Christian homes/shops attacked is put at 2,500 for WWL 2020, against 29,444 in WWL 2019. This large difference is caused by a variety of factors (in addition to the reasons already mentioned under the subsection “Christians killed” with the 'symbolic number 1000':

In the WWL 2020 reporting period more than 1,500 houses belonging to Christians in Kaduna, Taraba, Nasarawa, Benue and Adamawa States alone were destroyed. This excludes other houses and properties destroyed in Borno and Yobe States. The destruction has occurred at two levels of conflict: 1) The Fulani herdsmen wreaking havoc particularly in the Middle Belt. In places such as Barkin Ladi, Plateau State, many communities are in IDP camps and cannot return yet because their houses are completely destroyed. 2) The second factor concerns the Boko Haram conflict. Although the government claims the group has been defeated, Boko Haram is still attacking communities in the Christian populated communities of southern Borno and northern Adamawa States. ISWAP is adding to that violence in northern Borno.

Thousands of Christian shops and businesses have been closed and it is difficult to quantify. This is especially evident in communities that have been affected by Fulani herdsmen attacks and Boko Haram and ISWAP violence. The attacking, damaging and looting of Christian properties is carried out directly or indirectly. **Directly:** These properties are deliberately targeted and specifically attacked. **Indirectly:** Many Christians are forced to close down their shops or businesses because no security is provided. Due to the difficulty in making accurate estimations, this is why the 'symbolic number 1000' is used.

A note on retaliation by Christian groups:

The narrative about violence in Nigeria is complex and can be confusing. While Christians pinpoint Fulani aggression, Fulanis often claim they are retaliating for violence committed against them or their livestock by Christians. Christians committing violence against Fulani communities would also claim this as an act of retaliation.

In the Nigerian context it does not make sense to spend time trying to identify the original culprits. In most cases, a mass attack starts with something small. An example is the violent incident reported earlier in this document which took place on 8/5/2019 in Lau LGA, Taraba State. A conflict between a Fulani herdsman and a Kona farmer was the trigger for attacks and reprisal acts that continued for weeks and resulted in 65 deaths (55 Christians) and 18 burned villages (15 churches, two primary schools and a health centre). WWR sources revealed that the conflict started when a Fulani herder, who let his cattle graze freely on the farm of a Kona farmer, was confronted by the Christian farmer, asking why the cattle were eating his crops. The Fulani man then pulled his gun, but accidentally shot and killed his own brother, after which he withdrew and mobilized a group of Fulani militants who attacked this and several other villages, leaving many dead. Security forces that were deployed in the area did not intervene; on the contrary, in June 2019 many Kona youth were arrested during demonstrations by women and youth against the insecurity. In short, often there is a huge disbalance between the provocation and the scope of the retribution. Very often Christian farmers are the main victims of this.

5 Year trends

The following three charts show the situation for Christians in Nigeria over the last five reporting periods.

Chart 1:

The first chart below shows that the average pressure has consistently been very high, scoring above 12.0 points over the last five reporting periods and levelling off at 12.7 in the last two reporting periods.

WWL 2016 - WWL 2020 Persecution Pattern history: Nigeria	Average pressure over 5 Spheres of life
2020	12.7
2019	12.7
2018	12.1
2017	12.3
2016	12.3

Chart 2:

The chart below 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 and WWL 2020 reporting periods. *Community life* has consistently scored 13.0 points or above. Although the differences are not great, especially between *Community life* and *National* and *Church life*, it reflects the fact that lots of persecution is happening in the local communities where non-state actors play a key role. The effect of the increasing influence of President Buhari's suspected push for further coercive Islamization through national (Federal) structures, is not yet fully visible in the scores.

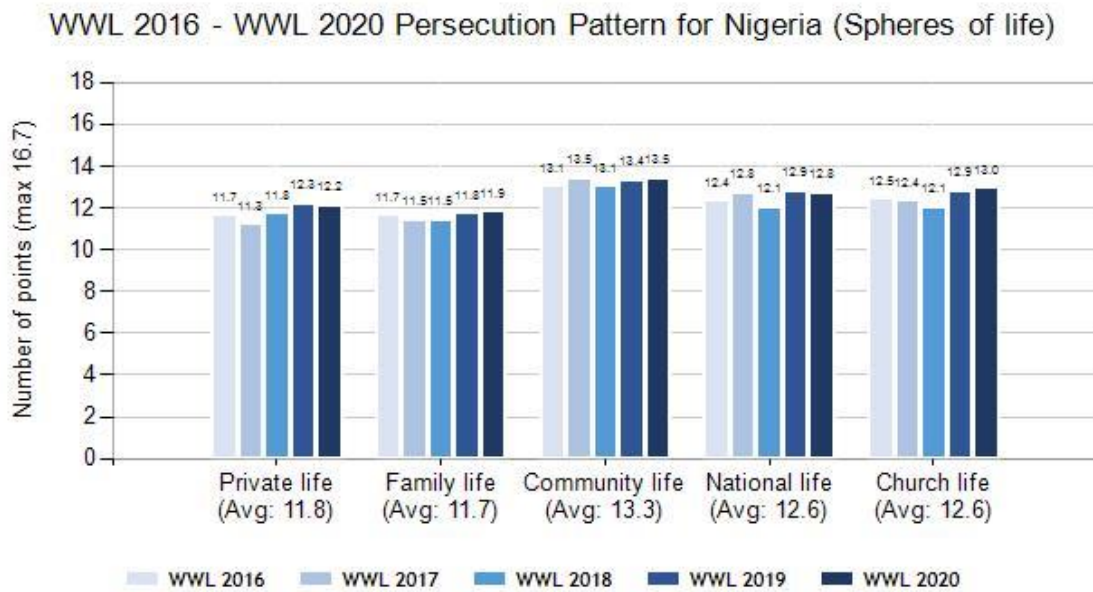
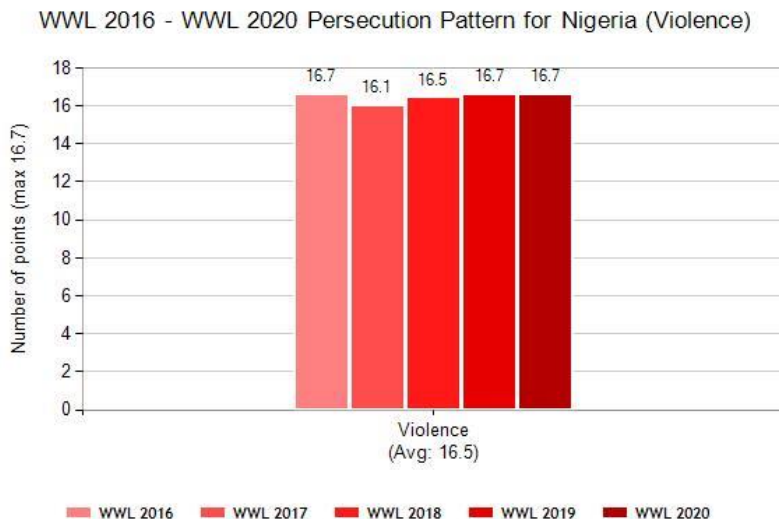


Chart 3:

The chart below depicts the violence scores over the last five reporting periods and shows the very stable, extreme level of violence targeting Christians. Three out of the five reporting periods show maximum scores.



Gender profile of persecution

Female Pressure points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Discrimination/Harassment via education***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Enforced religious dress code***
- ***Economic harassment via fines***
- ***Forced marriage***
- ***Targeted seduction***
- ***Trafficking***
- ***Violence - death***
- ***Violence - psychological***
- ***Violence - sexual***
- ***Violence - verbal***

In northeast Nigeria and in the Nigerian Middle Belt, the gender component of the attacks and suffering of Christian women and girls is almost in a class of its own. In raids by Boko Haram and ISWAP in the northeast and by Fulani herdsmen in the Middle Belt (and even some southern states) have terrorized Christian communities, captured their women and sexually abused them, forced some to be sex slaves, killed some and still collected ransom money from them. The desire to depopulate Christian-dominated territory has brought about an increase in abduction and forced marriage of Christian girls; married Christian women are victims of this, too. In extreme circumstances, teenage girls are being recruited by force to be used as suicide bombers.

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. Additionally, the fear that “something could happen to a Christian daughter” also leads Christian parents to have their daughters marry early as a kind of “protection”.

Christian students in schools in many northern states are forced to wear the Islamic code uniforms. In Kano State, all girls in schools must wear trousers and hijab. The fact that it is dangerous for girls to travel to school (or to attend classes) has the effect of encouraging parents to keep them at home; this then results in uneducated girls being generally ignorant of their rights. Furthermore, the abduction of Christian girls has led to parents sending their daughter to school outside the Sharia states.

When women are raped, their husbands often find it difficult to move past the trauma; many homes have broken up because of this. When girls are abducted, there is a deep sadness that falls upon the family. The men take it as often personal failure to protect their children. The families are left in deep trauma and stigma in the community; this can lead to greater challenges where there is a need for medical attention but resources are lacking. There is also a general practice of treating women as inferior to men, in rural regions especially, which makes it easier for them to be maltreated.

The general perception of the Hausa ethnic group is that women are not supposed to work outside the home and fend for themselves. Increasing poverty can increase their vulnerability to submitting to pressure from persecutors and they can fall into all sorts of problems in order to survive. 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.

Male Pressure points:

- ***Abduction***
- ***Discrimination/Harassment via education***
- ***Economic harassment via work/job/business***
- ***Forced to flee town/country***
- ***Incarceration by government***
- ***Incarceration by family***
- ***Military/militia conscription/service against conscience***
- ***Violence - death***
- ***Violence - physical***
- ***Violence - psychological***

In northeast Nigeria with Boko Haram and ISWAP, and in the Nigerian Middle Belt (and even some southern states) with the Fulani herdsmen, Christian men and boys are often specifically targeted for physical elimination by death.

This situation is aggravated by the activities of unidentified gunmen, for instance at road blocks. Among those who survive such attacks, many are abducted and forced to join the militant group. Violent attacks leading to death not only eliminates the current generation of men and boys, but the thinking is that killing males also guarantees that the birthrate in Christian families will drop considerably. In addition, young boys are at risk of being recruited as child soldiers, and there are reports of church leaders and church members being regularly abducted for ransom.

Such attacks have a devastating effect on the Church and Christian families. Men are usually the main breadwinners. The absence of the men or their incapacity to work leaves the women exposed to forced conversion, rape and sheer hopelessness. Even for those who are not physically threatened, many Christian men are frustrated as they cannot get admission into universities and cannot get jobs. Therefore, they feel forced to leave the country in search of better opportunities.

There is another dimension to the killing of men and older boys and leaving the mothers and younger siblings alive. The remaining families are very vulnerable and a living testimony of the overwhelming power of the perpetrators. This is particularly evident in the way the perpetrators are never brought to justice.

Persecution of other religious minorities

The story of persecution in Nigeria is mainly the story of the persecution of Christians. But there are others who are confronted with hostilities.

Not all Fulani are violent militants. Many of them, especially those that have settled and lived with their Christians neighbors for many years, simply want to live their daily lives and are increasingly confronted with violence by retaliation attacks carried out by Christian youth.

The Shiites (Islamic Movement of Nigeria) have been persecuted as well. They have faced violent attacks from Sunni groups. Members are killed and leaders imprisoned by the government. The government does not view what they are doing as persecution, rather they are confronting a group which seeks to be a government within a government in the country; a movement which seeks to operate under separate laws in the country.

The Biafra separatist movement (anchored in Judaism) has also been persecuted.

Future outlook for the church

The outlook for Christians as viewed through the lens of the blend of 4 (very) strong persecution engines *Islamic oppression, Dictatorial paranoia, Organized corruption and crime and Clan and ethnic antagonism*:

The overall threat for the Church in Nigeria is the increasingly pervasive, coercive process of Islamization in the country. This is not new but has grown during the presidency of Muhammadu Buhari. The concluding section below follows a question and answer format:

In which direction have changes occurred in this country regarding the treatment of Christians and/or the churches, over the past 12 months?

The way Christians are seen and treated has become worse in the past 12 months in Nigeria. This is seen at two levels: Government policies of appointment, allocation of resources and political capital exclude Christians. Secondly, those who attack Christians and destroy Christian properties are left unchallenged and are not prosecuted. This is made more tragic by the frequent refusal to provide security to Christian communities. Even when security is provided, security personnel are mostly Muslims who are compromised and unwilling to protect Christians because they are infidels.

Analysts label the level of fear of Christians as very high, and growing rapidly. Why?

Fear is growing rapidly under the current administration. Generally, Christians are worried that there is an Islamic agenda to dominate the land and make Nigeria an Islamic country. The fear is also amplified by the never-ending, always increasing threat of identified and unidentified gunmen, many of whom seem to be working to promote Islam. Additionally, there is an increase in the number of Nigerians going to Saudi Arabia for the *Hajj*. There is no monitoring of who they meet and what they discuss. Also, the increasing influence of Islam within government circles presents Christians as second-class citizens. This is made worse by the refusal to provide security for Nigerian Christians.

How would you describe the growth of the Church in this country over the past 12 months?

Generally speaking, Christianity is growing rapidly in Nigeria. First, there is the physical growth and penetration of Christianity into areas considered as exclusive Muslim territories. This is seen in the number of new churches constructed, the number of seminaries opened, more pastors trained and communities turning to Christianity. The second level of growth is the growing consciousness of Christians to ensure that Christianity identity becomes part of the political process to influence social and political policies. A third aspect is the way social media is now used in promoting Christian faith. The use of social media has grown tremendously and attracted millions of young people to Christianity.

Looking at hotspots of violence, this picture needs a slight correction. Church attendance is influenced by the violence. To mention a few examples: There are certain places in Jos (Plateau State) where churches have been abandoned due to the violent hostility of Muslims. In Borno and Yobe States, there are people still able to attend church in large numbers in the major cities, but this is not the case in some of the rural areas due to Boko Haram and ISWAP attacks.

Are there any "early warning" signs indicating that the churches or individual Christians in Nigeria may be facing greater levels of persecution in the future?

According to a country analyst: "The body language of the President (and some other key players) has been most discouraging, unexpected and totally unacceptable." He further explains that since President Buhari came to power in 2015, "the killings somehow spiked and one thought as a new President who campaigned as a law and order candidate, he will act swiftly.

Unfortunately, this wasn't the case. He did give some attention to fighting Boko Haram in the northeast, but he literally turned a blind eye to the Fulani herdsmen attacks in the Middle Belt of Nigeria. The President was literally silent in 2015, 2016, 2017. We must add also that he was also unwell so not much was done. When he spoke in 2018, he justified the attackers by saying that those carrying out the attacks are Fulanis from outside, fighters who escaped from Libya with arms. Standing side by side with President Trump in America at a Press Conference at the Rose Garden with the world watching, President Buhari said Fulanis don't carry AK 47s but sticks. This was unbelievable. Yet the Fulanis are killing his country men and women with AK 47s."

Another country observer stated: "Christians conclude that the President and some of his key actors are not interested in the protection of Christians but in defending the actions of his fellow Fulani attackers."

The increasing presence of violent Islamic groups in the country and other neighbouring countries, forecasts danger ahead. Boko Haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen and unidentified gunmen all possess types and quantities of weapons that raise questions about their origin. Country analysts claim that there is foreign influence from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran and possibly Turkey in funding and fueling the ideologies of radical Islam in Nigeria.

Another early warning is that the complete security apparatus in Nigeria has been brought under the control of Muslims during the administration of President Buhari (since 2015). While this process took place, the President ignored the public outcry of citizens over the security situation which remains unpredictable and continues to deteriorate.

Also, climate change will continue to impact Nigeria through the desert encroachment. While climate change and environmental degradation have been used as excuses for persecution in Nigeria ('persecution eclipse'), its continuous effects will further complicate the turbulent situation in the country. A solution has to be found.

If the current situation continues unabated, all-out chaos could result. Out of the ashes a new Nigeria might emerge, but one built on the bitter fruits of violent jihadism, with a Nigerian Church that is heavily curtailed if not virtually non-existent. Such a scenario would not only be disastrous for Nigeria but also for the entire region and beyond. A preview of how it could look was presented by the Islamic State group's short-lived caliphate in Syria/Iraq.

External Links - WWL 2020: Persecution Dynamics

- Geographical hotspots of persecution: Nigeria - Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Ethnic-cleansing-in-the-Middle-Belt-Region-of-Nigeria-2015.pdf>
- Pressure in the spheres of life: Grossly inadequate - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Nigeria-Assessment-of-Christian-situation-in-4-north-eastern-states-June-2017.pdf>

Additional reports and articles

WWR in-depth reports

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

- [Nigeria – Compound structural vulnerabilities facing Christian women \(revised version\) – 2019](#)
- [Nigeria – Assessment of Christian situation in 4 north-eastern states – 2018](#)
- [Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Short version 2018](#)
- [Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 1 – 2018](#)
- [Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 2 \(appendices\) – 2018](#)
- [Nigeria – Benue State – Short version – 2017](#)
- [Nigeria – Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” \(2014-2016\) with update: January-August 2017 – 2017](#)
- [Nigeria – Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State – 2016](#)
- [Nigeria – Appraising the Buhari administration – 2016](#)
- [Nigeria – Violent Conflict in Taraba State \(2013 – 2015\) – 2015](#)
- [Nigeria – Ethnic cleansing in the Middle Belt Region – 2015](#)
- [Nigeria – Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies – 2015](#)
- [Nigeria – Boko Haram and Gender-based violence against Christian women and children in north-eastern Nigeria since 1999 – reissued 2015](#)

World Watch Monitor news articles

Articles are available at: <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/countries/nigeria>

Recent country developments

Up-to-date articles are available at: <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/?s=Nigeria> (password: freedom).

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- WWR in-depth reports: Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 1 – 2018 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Nigeria-Southern-Kaduna-Volume-1-FINAL.pdf>

- WWR in-depth reports: Nigeria – Southern Kaduna – Volume 2 (appendices) – 2018 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/Nigeria-Southern-Kaduna-Volume-2.pdf>
- WWR in-depth reports: Nigeria – Benue State – Short version – 2017 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Nigeria-Benue-State-Short-version-WWR-2017.pdf>
- WWR in-depth reports: Nigeria – Benue State under the shadow of “herdsmen terrorism” (2014-2016) with update: January-August 2017 – 2017 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Nigeria-Benue-State-2017-WWR.pdf>
- WWR in-depth reports: Nigeria – Investigating common narratives of violent conflict in Nasarawa State – 2016 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Nigeria-Investigating-common-narratives-of-violent-conflict-in-Nasarawa-State-2016.pdf>
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- WWR in-depth reports: Nigeria – Boko Haram and Gender-based violence against Christian women and children in north-eastern Nigeria since 1999 – reissued 2015 - <http://opendoorsanalytical.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>