



Nigeria and Religious Persecution:

Deconstructing a Linear Narrative



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Ministry of Foreign Affairs Abuja.

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Introduction:

On March 13, 2025, the United States Congress passed a resolution clearing President Donald Trump to impose sanctions on Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern (CPC). A CPC is a country with a manifest propensity to religious intolerance, discrimination and persecution. Nigeria was first designated a CPC in 2020, during the last year of Trump's first term as president. However, Nigeria was removed from the CPC list by the administration of Joe Biden in 2021.

The recent attempt by the US to re-designate Nigeria as a CPC is premised on the claims of historical persecution of Christians in the country.[1] Christianity, alongside Islam, constitutes the most dominant established religion in Nigeria. Historically, the relationship between adherents and protagonists of these mainstream religions has been marked by tension and mistrust. The instrumentalization and manipulation of religion have complicated this situation in the context of identitarian contestations at the national and sub-national levels.[2]

Essentially, the politicization of religion has been an abiding feature of Nigeria's national political life. Its contradictions have often led to fatal outcomes, as evidenced by the episodes of religious conflagrations in various parts of the country over the years. At the center of such a crisis are the claims and counterclaims of religious victimization and persecution by one religion against the other. In the context of Northern Nigeria, the minority Christian populations of the region have complained of systematic oppression and persecution by forces they perceive as representing the national and international Islamic establishment. Claims of religious persecution have been a thorny and controversial issue in Nigeria. Although many of the claims have come from Christian communities and their international sympathizers, there have been isolated instances where non-Christians have also claimed to have been persecuted.[3]

Associated with the religious persecution phenomenon are threats of oppression, suppression, victimization, discrimination, and profiling on grounds of faith. In Nigeria, such tendencies have often occurred in competitive ethno-communal struggles where identity politics, based on religious mobilization, holds a salience.

This report deconstructs the prevailing religious persecution allegation against Nigeria, which presupposes that Christians have suffered persecution in many instances of armed violence that Muslims have perpetrated. It will challenge prevailing narratives and counter-narratives on the subject matter, which have been widely disseminated in domestic and international media, sparking intense debates and reactions. The report argues that the persecution narrative fails to present the complexities of the issue it seeks to explain.

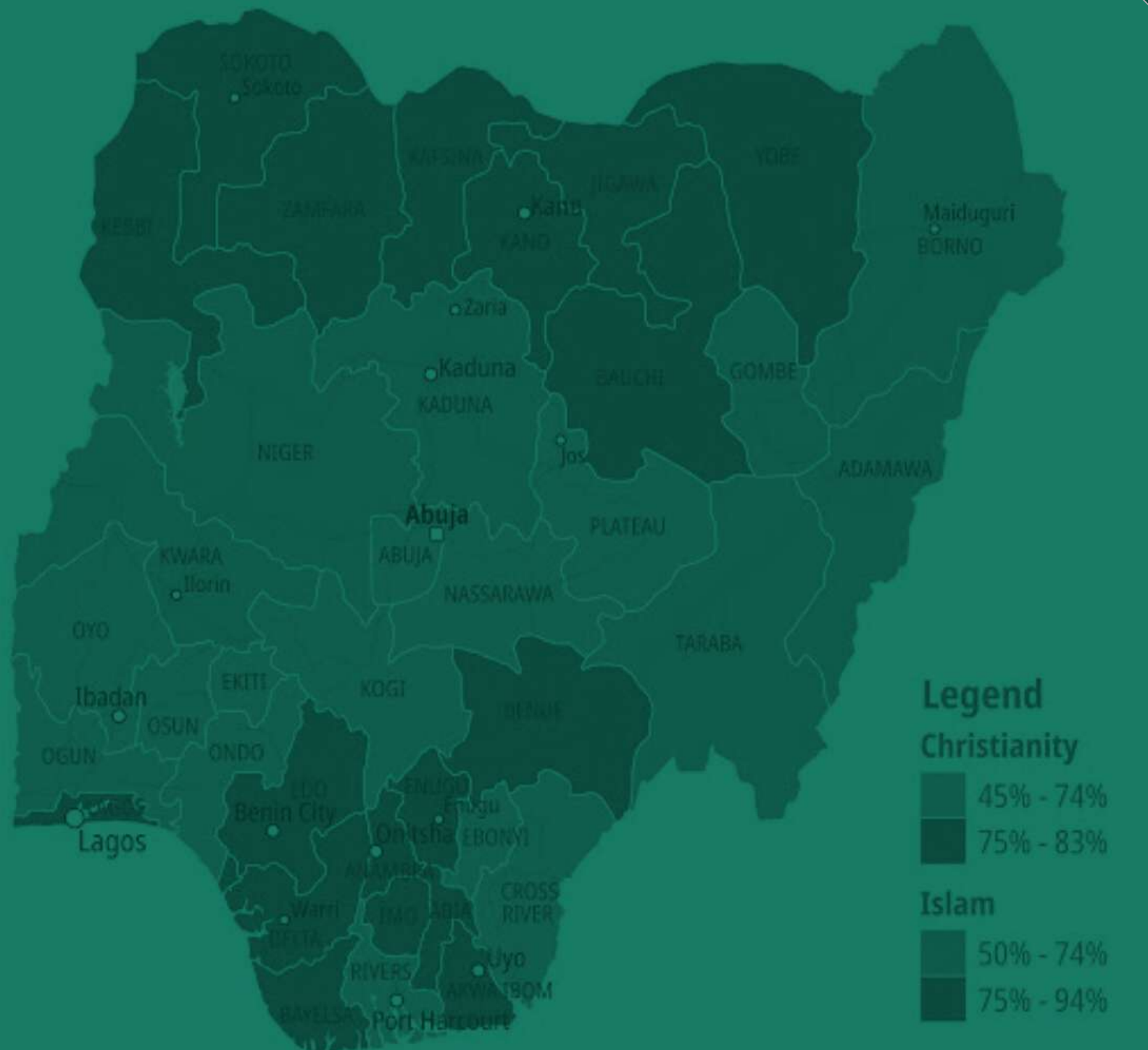
Mindful of the sensitive nature of the subject, the study will adopt a posture of objective analysis based on available facts and figures. It will show, among others, that although Christians have been victims of the various episodes of armed violence in the country's North, empirical evidence does not seem to adequately and consistently support the claim that they are essentially targeted because of their faith. To be sure, both Christians and Muslims have been victimized and persecuted in the series of armed violence orchestrated by disparate anti-state elements in the country. While such incidents have often assumed ethno-religious dimensions, pitting Christians against Muslims, and vice versa, it is apparent that religion is less of a 'bottomline' than a 'faultline' in such a context. In any case, the victims of the violence have been Nigerian citizens of all faiths.

Among other things, the report study seeks to answer the following fundamental questions:

- I. *What are the social dynamics of the prevailing armed violence in Nigeria?*
- II. *Does violence possess any inherent, objective religious significance?*
- III. *How factual and consistent is the claim that a religious category is targeted for persecution?*
- IV. *How can the 'religious persecution' narrative be deconstructed to reveal the underlying objective currents?*



NIGERIA Largest Religion by Province



01

Situating the Discourse:



The Danger of a Single, Linear Narrative

The move by the US government to designate Nigeria as a CPC is based on a shred of circumstantial evidence that is neither wholly false nor entirely accurate. Associated with that is the danger of a single narrative. The problem with a single narrative about the allegation or perception of religious persecution in Nigeria is that it oversimplifies the complex and nuanced issue that it seeks to address.

Implicit in the Christian persecution narrative is the linear and simplistic ‘us versus them’ or, worse still, ‘persecutor versus victim’ binarism. First, the narrative tends to ignore the salient historical, socio-cultural and socio-economic contexts that define and shape the conflict situations in which religious violence occurs in Nigeria. Some conflict situations are rooted in contestations that were originally economic or cultural in nature. Nevertheless, they have, over time, evolved into outcomes that exacerbate existing religious or sectarian fault lines. We shall return to this critical issue subsequently.

Second, the narrative fails to account for or reflect the diverse perspectives and experiences of the different groups involved in the conflicts, including non-Christians and indigenous peoples. This is also reflected in the fact that the narrative often overlooks the intra-group dimension and dynamics of religious disputes. Sectarian schisms in both Christianity and Islam have also presented pretexts for claims and counterclaims of religious persecution in Nigeria. A case in point is the El-Zakzaky-linked Shiite disturbances in Kaduna State.[4]

The danger of a single narrative as it relates to explaining Nigeria’s religious tensions is that it perpetrates stereotypes about certain groups, thereby reinforcing harmful and hateful prejudices. More importantly, it creates scapegoats by blaming one broad group for a problem instead of acknowledging the complex dynamics of the situation, including the factor of shared stakes and responsibilities in the context of a conflict experience.

In terms of problem-solving, a single narrative tends to polarize debates or public discourse on delicate religious issues, making it difficult to engage in constructive dialogue aimed at finding common ground. It also limits the range of possibilities for solutions as it focuses on the blame game rather than addressing the underlying issues. The divisive rhetoric associated with a single narrative in sensitive interfaith relations exacerbates tension and undermines the prospects of peacebuilding. It also ignores the shared humanity of all groups, making it more problematic to build bridges and foster sustainable reconciliation.

By recognizing the dangers of a single narrative, we can work towards a more balanced and nuanced understanding of the complex issues surrounding religious tensions in Nigeria, including the claims and counterclaims of religious persecution. This will entail the ability to listen to diverse perspectives, contextualize issues, and foster constructive dialogue. Essentially, such concerns are at the core of the present report.

Understanding the Peculiarity of Nigeria’s Complex Armed Violence Terrain

Nigeria has been plagued by armed violence, often erroneously attributed to religious differences between Christians and Muslims. Such a narrative, however, oversimplifies the complex dynamics driving the violence. A meaningful understanding and interpretation of the peculiarity of contemporary armed violence in Nigeria must move beyond the simplistic and linear religious lens to come to terms with the dynamic interplay of historical, socio-economic, and political undercurrents that underlie such occurrences in different contexts.

The unfortunate colonial connection

Historically, the British colonial administration laid a foundation that has made religion a veritable factor in many instances of armed violence in Nigeria. The British colonial authority amalgamated the predominantly Christian Southern Nigeria and the Muslim-dominant Northern Nigeria into a single, yet not unified, political entity in 1914. However, these separate regions were administered differently in keeping with the logic of indirect rule. There was no serious attempt to integrate the areas into a cohesive polity until Independence.

For instance, while Southern Nigeria practiced a legal system modelled after the British Common Law, Northern Nigeria maintained a distinct legal dispensation where Islamic (Sharia) law governed personal and family life. In contrast, British Common Law governed civil and criminal matters. This development, among others, laid the foundation for the contemporary tension between secularism and theopolism in Nigeria. It is also the cradle of the Sharia crisis in Nigeria. It is worth noting that the implementation of Sharia Law in Northern Nigeria has been one of the key drivers of religious tensions and disturbances in the region since the post-independence era. The Sharia unrest of the early 2000s in many parts of Northern Nigeria evinced this reality.

Religious violence

Religious riots or disturbances have been a recurring phenomenon in Nigeria. They have often been exacerbated by political factors, particularly in electoral contests. A case in point is the 2011 episodes of religious violence in Kaduna State in which mosques and churches were destroyed, in addition to loss of lives and population displacement. Note that many instances of religious disturbances in Nigeria have occurred in the context of contestations for civic or economic space by individuals or groups that, coincidentally, are adherents of different religions. Generally, what is salient in such contestations is more political than religious.

Boko Haram insurgency

Boko Haram insurgency, which began in 2009, has been a major driver of armed violence in Nigeria. Although rooted in radical Islamism, the insurgency has been associated with a mix of ideological, socio-economic, structural, and political factors. Among these factors are poverty, illiteracy, unemployment, and governance deficit.[5] Boko Haram insurgency has led to the killing of both Christians and Muslims in Northern Nigeria and beyond.

Farmer-herder conflict

Farmer-herder conflict has been a key pattern of armed violence in Nigeria. It has been most pronounced and widespread in the country's North Central zone, leading to mortal consequences. In states like Benue, Plateau, Nasarawa, and Niger, it has often assumed a very dangerous dynamic, pitting one ethno-communal group against another in a vicious cycle of armed vendetta. In such contexts, the herders are perceived as jihadists who are driven by the quest to Islamize the indigenous populations.[6] This Manichean perception and its associated narratives tend to oversimplify the farmer-herder conflict, obscuring its salient socio-ecological and economic undercurrents.

In many instances of farmer-herder clashes where religious motivation has been alleged, what is really and pertinently at issue may have little or nothing to do with religion. Some of the herder attacks on non-Muslim communities are reprisal aggression by which the herder or their mercenary militants sought to seek retaliation for human or material losses they have suffered in the previous conflicts with their vicious competitors—the settled farming communities. An example is the recent reprisal violence by herders in a rural community in Ebonyi State, in which a local church was attacked during a Sunday service, leading to the killing of some worshippers.[7]

Banditry

Nigeria's banditry crisis is a complex phenomenon involving a mix of criminality, mercenary, terrorism, acrimonious identity politics, as well as development and governance deficits.[8] Although bandits in Northern Nigeria do not necessarily discriminate between Christians and Muslims in their onslaughts, they have often been perceived as jihadists who are selectively targeting the non-Muslim population, suggestively in pursuit of a grand Islamic agenda.[9] Even though the bandits have been involved in a series of attacks on Christian communities, they are not, essentially, religious actors in that context. Often, they have been enlisted as mercenary fighters by herding communities in their ongoing conflicts with settled farmers.

The social context and dynamics of banditry are such that ethnic or religious interpretations have been given to bandit attacks. Hence, their militancy in Northwest Nigeria has increasingly taken on an ethnic rather than a spiritual dimension. Nevertheless, their attacks in Central Nigeria, especially on non-Muslim populations, have been widely perceived as a selective religious war. Note that bandits have killed more Muslims than Christians in the broader Northwest, much as they have also killed more Christians than Muslims in the North Central region of the country. This salient twist does not seem to resonate with the dominant and prevailing anecdotes on Nigeria's banditry discourse.

The point being emphasized in the foregoing is that the contextual dynamics of armed violence in Nigeria must be appropriately situated in any attempt to understand the issues at stake. Essentially, armed violence in Nigeria is a complex phenomenon driven by a multiplicity of factors way beyond the monolithic religious explanation propagated by some analysts. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for crafting a narrative that presents a balanced and nuanced perspective on the incidents, one that transcends the linear and overly simplistic religious interpretation.

Deconstructing the 'Religious Persecution' Narrative about Nigeria

The substance of the religious persecution allegation against Nigeria has derived from multiple accounts and reports emanating from both national and international faith-based organizations and their sympathizers. The emphasis of the narrative has been on the violation of the religious freedom of Christians in the context of the rising jihadi violence in which the government is perceived to have failed to come to the rescue of the oppressed and victimized. The narrative has been woven around several themes and perspectives (Table 1).



Table 1: Situating the Religious Persecution Narrative

WHAT?	WHICH?
Sources/ Canvassers	• <i>The US Congress Committees</i> • <i>Individual concern Congressmen in the US</i> • <i>Religious lobby groups</i> • <i>Some Nigerians-in-diaspora groups</i> • <i>Faith-based organizations in Nigeria</i>
Perspectives	• <i>State complacency/complicity narrative</i> • <i>Jihadist conspiracy theory</i> • <i>Fulanization narrative</i> • <i>Sharia and Blasphemy laws (violation of religious freedom)</i>

Source: Compiled from sundry documentary and anecdotal materials

Of all the available sources propagating the religious (Christian) persecution narrative, the claims and advocacies of the US-based Observatory of Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA) has been the most widespread and damning (Table 1). The 2024 edition of the ORFA report[10] (covering the period of 2019-2023) makes the following allegations (author paraphrases apply):

- Violent extremists of Northern Nigeria, comprising terrorists, bandits and herder-militants, are engaged in a religious war against the Christian populations of the region.
- Fulani militants account for about 42% of the total civilian casualties in Nigeria in the reporting year.
- Terrorists account for about 10% of the civilian deaths in the period.
- Fulani militia (bandits and herder militants) are ethno-religious groups.
- Christians are killed for every Muslim in the reporting period.
- Christian tolls in terror attacks are way higher than those of Muslims.
- Proportionally, as per focal states of incidents, 6.5 times as many Christians are being killed as Muslims.
- Christians are 1.4 times more likely to be killed than Muslims.
- Fulani militias are profiling and targeting Christians.
- The vulnerable populations of the North Central and the broader Middle Belt (predominantly Christian or at least non-Muslim) are primarily left undefended by the government.

To engage the 'religious persecution' allegation against Nigeria meaningfully, it is germane to take on the quadruple dimensions of the associated narrative, as highlighted in Table 1. The state complacency/complicity narrative purports a tacit involvement or enablement of the government and its institutions in promoting the persecution of Christians. It portrays the government as being either indifferent or incompetent to come to the rescue of the suffering Christian populations, who have been subjected to religious victimization and persecution. An extreme dimension of this narrative holds that the Nigerian state has, by design or default, promoted practices that encourage and institutionalize violence against Christians through measures such as the implementation of the Sharia and Blasphemy laws.[11]

It is worth noting that Nigeria has remained a secular state, as outlined in its Federal Constitution. It has also remained a signatory to several international conventions that affirm its commitment to religious pluralism and freedom of religion. Examples include (i) the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, (ii) the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and (iii) the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Additionally, the country has established institutional mechanisms to mediate interfaith relations and promote peace and coexistence. A case in point is the Nigerian Inter-Religious Council (NIREC), composed of members drawn from the country's hierarchies of Islamic and Christian faiths.

The jihadist conspiracy narrative holds that there has been an age-long quest by the Fulani establishment to further the cause of Islamization in the wider Northern Nigeria through enforced conversion, anti-Christian attrition, and jihadi violence. The narrative cites 'selective' attacks on Christian communities and the destruction of churches by terrorists and bandits as strategies to the Islamization agenda.

It should be noted that the militants operating in Northern Nigeria have killed both Christians and Muslims. A seminal study conducted by Chouin et al[12] Found that two of every three civilian casualties associated with the Boko Haram insurgency between 2009 and 2012 were Muslim. Considering the strength of its empirical evidence, the study submitted its findings, among other things:

...challenges the common-place temptation to understand the (Boko Haram) crisis in terms of a religious confrontation between Muslims and Christians (p.213).

Boko Haram insurgents have also attacked both churches and mosques alike. They have equally raided communities that are predominantly Muslim or non-Christian. Generally, the various militant groups operating in Northern Nigeria, be they bandits or terrorists, are not necessarily religious elements who are engaged in selective profiling and killing of non-Muslims. They are, properly understood, anti-state forces whose motives are variously more ideological or economic than religious. Although the ideology of the insurgents has come to be associated with radical Islam, these elements do not seem to be acting on behalf of any Muslim authority in the country.

The bandits in Northern Nigeria are opportunistic criminals whose onslaught has spared no specific faith group. With its epicenter in Nigeria's northwest, banditry is believed to have led to the death of more Muslims than Christians.[13] The manifestation of banditry in the North Central geopolitical region has tended to portray a religious colouration, given the preponderance of non-Muslim populations in the area. In this context, bandit attacks have been motivated by a variety of factors, including sheer criminality and mercenary interests. There are isolated instances where bandits have been hired by embattled herder communities in the region to assist them in fighting their adversaries within the context of the internecine farmer-herder conflict in the area.

The non-Muslim populations in the area erroneously perceive bandit attacks in North Central Nigeria as religious aggression perpetrated by the jihadi-inspired bandits. Although most bandits are Fulani, not many of them are Muslims.[14] A good number of them are animists, so it cannot be legitimately said that they are fighting a religious war in all instances.

The Fulanization narrative projects the Fulani as a hegemonic and expansionist ethnic group that is driven by the quest to dominate and take over the agrarian and civic landscapes of Northern Nigeria. The indigenous communities in the Middle Belt region[15] Believe that the Fulani are engaged in an age-long expansionist movement aimed at dispossessing them of their native lands. A part of this narrative holds that the Fulani have capitalized on their transhumance practices to plant their sedentary communes among the natives in the perpetration of their sinister expansionist agenda.

The Nigerian constitution guarantees the right to legitimate economic migration to every Nigerian. The migration of herding communities has posed an inevitable threat to inter-group relations, given the frosty trajectory of the farmer-herder crisis in many parts of the country. Nonetheless, the government has implemented several measures to mitigate this threat. The efforts have ranged from the revitalization of grazing routes and reserves to the introduction of RUGA herder settlement communes. [16]

The newly created Federal Ministry of Livestock Development represents a further step in institutionalizing mechanisms to ensure peaceful and sustainable agrarian relations in Nigeria. The recent appointment of Professor Attahiru Jega, a seasoned scholar-statesman, as the Special Advisor and Coordinator of Livestock Reform further demonstrates the government's commitment to addressing the persistent issues surrounding the pastoral crisis and farmer-herder conflict in the country.

Lastly, the implementation of Sharia and Blasphemy laws in Northern Nigeria has presented a structural pretext for the victimization and oppression of non-Muslims. It has amounted to the imposition of a 'state religion' in sharp contradistinction to the principles of religious freedom and secularism espoused in the Constitution. It should be noted, however, that such practices have arisen from the inherent contradictions of federalism in the country, which have allowed states (federating units) to legislate on matters of religion. This is not peculiar to Northern Nigeria in particular.

There have been isolated cases of religious inferences by the state governments in other parts of the country, the latest being the recent attempt by the Anambra State House of Assembly to create a law that criminalizes aspects of traditional worship practices in the state within the framework of the state's Homeland Security Law.[17]

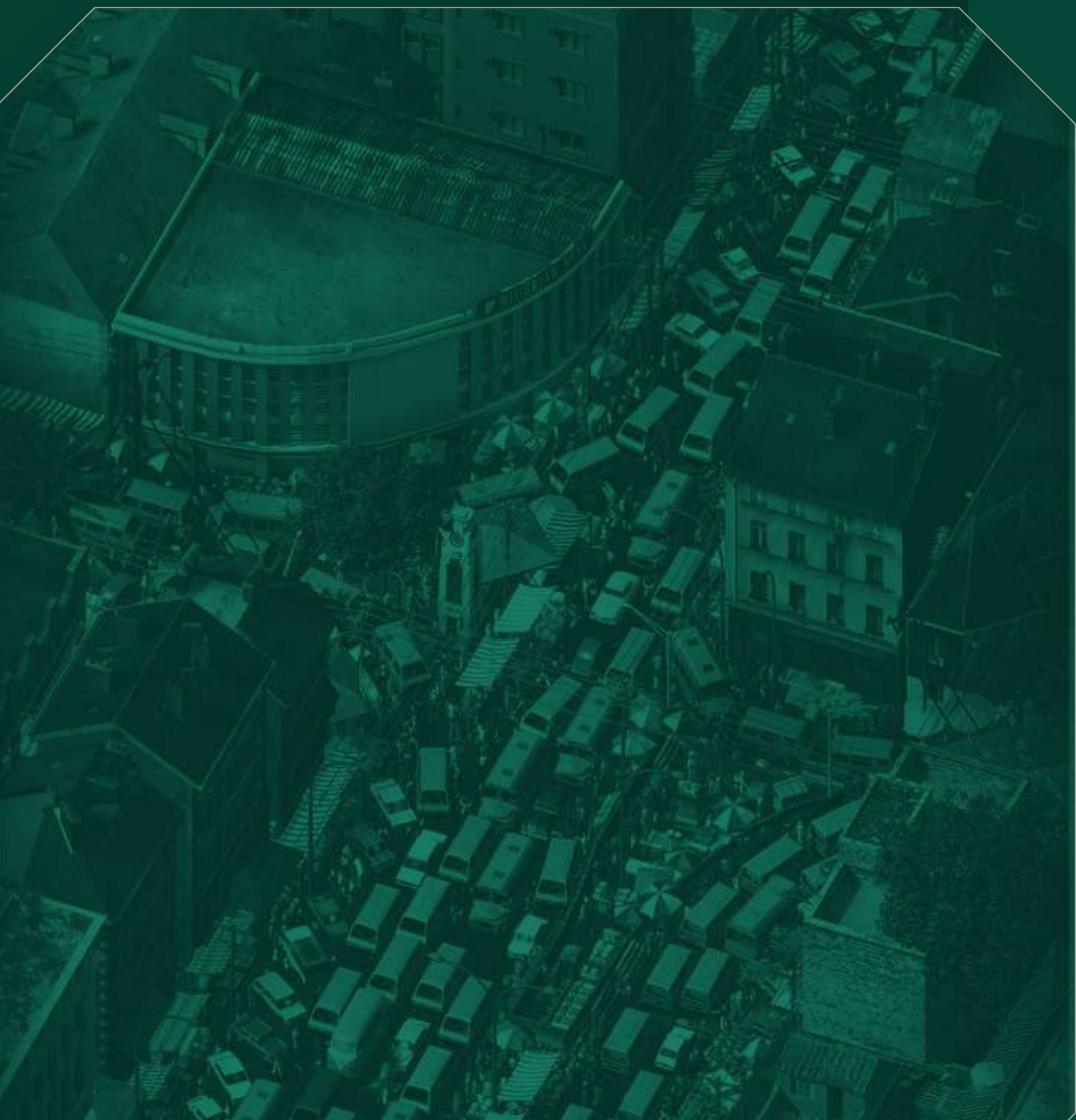


The figures and narratives underpinning the religious persecution allegation against Nigeria are, at best, controversial. Apart from the fact that their sources are opaque, they have been incompetent in explaining the complex dynamics that define and condition contemporary armed violence in Nigeria beyond the linear perspective of religious essentiality. Without necessarily repudiating the entirety of the religious persecution narrative, it is pertinent to make the following objective observations:

1. The nature and integrity of the research that informed the narrative cannot be wholly guaranteed. It is unclear how respondents or informants were selected, how the aggregate data were processed, how they were disaggregated into religious categories, and how the outcome was determined and validated.
2. The contextual specifics and dynamics of the focal conflicts were not fully and adequately highlighted. For instance, bandit attacks have assumed an ethno-communal dimension in predominantly Muslim contexts (say Zamfara, Katsina) but have taken a peculiar religious dimension in predominantly Christian locations (for instance, in Plateau, Southern Kaduna, rural Nasarawa and Benue).
3. The role of religion in farmer- herder and banditry crises was not adequately addressed. Indeed, not all Fulani are Muslim. Many of them are not, which is why there is a problem of oversimplification.
4. The relative proportionality between Christian and non-Christian fatalities about the focal conflicts was also oversimplified. For instance, when bandits attack a predominantly Christian or non-Muslim location, the tendency is that Muslims may hardly count among the victims, and vice versa.
5. Despite the apparent relative proportionality between Muslim and Christian victims, the figures shown clearly indicate a significantly high proportion of victimhood for both sides. This implies that people are killed across the divide.
6. The apparent indictment of the government as incompetent, complacent, or indifferent in the face of the crisis seems unfair. It fails to acknowledge the modest and sincere efforts of the government so far, amid domestic and external factors that undermine its functionality, including the dearth of the necessary international goodwill and support.

The current government, led by Bola Ahmed Tinubu, has demonstrated considerable good faith in ensuring the political balancing of ethno-religious interests when making primary national political appointments. Although the President ran on a controversial Muslim-Muslim ticket, he has reasonably kept faith with Nigeria's Federal Character principle by ensuring that there is a fair representation of members of the two dominant religions in his Cabinet. Currently, the country's Chief of Defence Staff, Chief of the Police Force, and the Head of the Department of State Service (DSS) are all Christians. This marks a significant progressive shift from the immediate past government, whose primary appointments in the national security sector were skewed in favour of the Muslim North. So, why would Christians feel unsafe under the prevailing circumstance?





02

Beyond CPC Designation:



What the US and its Allies Need to Know and Do

1. The US and its allies need to understand the peculiarity of contemporary violent conflicts in Nigeria in which religion is often implicated. Such occurrences have not been essentially and consistently religious, both in cause and effect. They have been motivated by various factors, including criminality, insurgency, and others.
2. The perpetrators of such violence are not necessarily religious actors. A lot of them are opportunistic criminals or disparate anti-state elements that do not represent any religious interest or identity.
3. The victims of the violence have been Nigerian citizens of all faiths. Christians, Muslims, and adherents of other religions have been killed, displaced, or injured in such violence.
4. Although Christians appear to have been affected mainly by the violence, especially in Northern Nigeria, non-Christian populations have also been significantly affected.
5. The government's inability to address the problem is not an affirmation of the state's complacency, indifference, conspiracy, or complicity. Instead, it reflects the fundamental weaknesses of Nigeria's security and governance institutions.
6. The designation of Nigeria as a CPC will deny the country the needed international goodwill and support to confront the salient issues underlying and driving armed violence in the country.
7. Sanctioning Nigeria as a CPC may be counter-productive, as the ultimate sufferer of such an outcome will be the citizenry, some of whom are already in dire need of humanitarian and development assistance.
8. The US needs to support Nigeria's efforts in addressing the material conditions that precipitate and promote violent conflict and extremism through focused developmental initiatives in education, youth empowerment and poverty reduction.
9. The US also needs to partner with Nigeria in mitigating the humanitarian impact of violent extremism by prioritising the provision of more funds and logistics to that end.
10. Lastly, the US needs to demonstrate a more significant commitment to providing military assistance to Nigeria, including training, logistics, and technical resources. This is in addition to supporting ongoing post-conflict peacebuilding and stabilization efforts.

What Nigeria Needs to Do

1. The Nigerian Government must reaffirm its commitment to upholding secularism and defending religious freedom. This must be demonstrated through credible policies and actions that protect religious minorities, guarantee freedom of worship, and foster interfaith dialogue.
2. The government must thoroughly investigate attacks on any religious community and prosecute the perpetrators. This will help ensure justice for victims and their families and demonstrate the government's commitment to protecting the lives and freedoms of all citizens, irrespective of their creed.
3. The government should provide adequate security for the vulnerable communities in the country's conflict zones. This should include stationing troops in the areas and instituting early warning/ early response mechanisms to preempt and predict attacks.
4. The government should be pragmatic in identifying and addressing the underlying causes of violence, including competition for power and resources, poverty, inequality, unemployment, and the ethno-religious dynamics of identity politics. This could involve measures aimed at promoting the socio-economic conditions of the people as well as fostering intergroup coexistence.
5. The government should promote interfaith dialogue and encourage religious leaders to promote peace and tolerance in a positive manner. Repositioning the existing interfaith institutions and supporting local institutions to promote interreligious harmony is crucial.
6. The government should ensure accountability, transparency and good faith in its response to allegations of religious persecution. Rather than becoming unnecessarily perturbed and agitated, the government should conduct an independent investigation into the allegations, ensuring that the findings are made public and actionable.



Conclusion

Although the issue of religious persecution in Nigeria is complex, nuanced and controversial, the question of whether Nigeria is a destination for religious persecution can be answered quite objectively. Indeed, while Nigeria has witnessed a series of violent conflicts in which the factor of religion was apparent, it is not fair and reasonable to describe Nigeria as 'a country of concern' where the state does not uphold religious freedom.

First, there is no objective premise that the Nigerian state is supporting or condoning the oppression and killings of a particular religious group. Although the government at both national and sub-national levels appears to have been overwhelmed by the country's complex security challenges, it cannot be said that the government is indifferent or complacent in the face of this situation. The adversities of crime, terrorism and other forms of violent extremism have fatally challenged the coercive and affective competencies of the Nigerian government. What Nigeria needs to overcome the vagaries of its national security today is sustained goodwill, support, and partnership with the international community and its stakeholders.

Based on the strengths and merit of the facts and narratives considered in this report, it is apparent that religion has been more incidental than essential to many instances of armed conflict/ violence in Nigeria. Rather than being a 'bottom line' in such contexts, religion has represented a faultline, conflating and complicating the dynamics of conflicts. It is, therefore, pertinent to problematize every instance of 'religious conflict' in the country to tease out the underlying issues that drive it.

Essentially, people of all faiths—be they Christians, Muslims, or atheists—have been victims of armed violence in Nigeria. Even in typical situations of religious violence, the victims have been (more or less) innocent Nigerian citizens, some of whom cannot relate to the objective realities of the conflict situation under which they have been victimized or killed. So, while the narrative of religious persecution might be necessary, mainly because of its implications for religious freedom in the country, what is crucial is the need to protect the lives and property of all Nigerians from all threats, irrespective of whether they are religious or not. This has been the charge of the government at the various levels in the country.

In conclusion, while Nigeria undoubtedly faces significant challenges related to religious violence, intolerance, and discrimination, the narrative that Nigeria is a destination for religious persecution is overly simplistic and in bad faith. This report has highlighted the complexities of the delicate Nigerian ethno-religious conflict landscape, demonstrating the efforts of the government and other stakeholders in fostering peace and interfaith dialogue.

A necessary conclusion that follows from the foregoing is that authorities in Nigeria have remained committed to upholding secular principles and promoting freedom of religion and interfaith dialogue in the country. Rather than perpetuating a narrative that reinforces divisions and fuels further violence, analysts need to adopt a more nuanced and balanced understanding that recognizes Nigeria's ethno-religious dynamics and the many efforts underway to promote peace, tolerance and coexistence.

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14. Okoli & Ngom, Op cit.
15. The Middle Belt refers to the geopolitical extraction that encompasses most of the native and non-Muslim populations of the country's northern region.
16. The RUGA initiative met with stiff resistance from the Christian-dominated states. It was viewed by some critics as a state-sponsored land-grabbing in favour of the Fulani herdsmen.
17. In January, 2025, Anambra State Government introduced a comprehensive state legislation that seeks to provide a framework for, among others, the regulation of neo-paganism and idolatry. See the Legislation: <https://anambrastate.gov.ng/wp-content/uploads/ANAMBRA-STATE-HOMELAND-SECURITY-LAW-2025.pdf>



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