

NIGERIAN ATROCITIES DOCUMENTATION PROJECT (NADP)

FINAL REPORT

DISCLAIMER:

This report contains sensitive information and disturbing images. Reader discretion is therefore advised

TABLE OF CONTENT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY3

INTRODUCTION.....3

METHODOLOGY4

CONTEXT5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....6

 First Quarter7

 Second Quarter14

 Third Quarter.....24

CHALLENGES.....30

CONCLUSION.....31

RECOMMENDATION.....31

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a data-driven report that documented violent atrocities of armed Non-state actors in Northern Nigeria from January 2022- February 2023. It provides tracked incidents of attacks on Christians and minority groups on a quarterly basis while analysing the ideological and socio-political drivers of violence by the non-state actors, as well as the impact of these attacks on victims. On strategies that must be deployed to address the security crises in Northern Nigeria, the report provides some policy recommendation for the Federal Government, security agencies, the international community and other stakeholders like the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN). It also makes suggestions as to why it is necessary to sustain this project in whatever way possible.

INTRODUCTION

The persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria is on the rise. Incidences of marginalization, discrimination, and violent attacks against Christian communities in the region are often underreported and undocumented. This has given the perpetrators of these atrocities more impetus to execute heinous crimes against Christians in the Northern region. In cases where religiously motivated attacks are carried out against Christians, pretexting factors like the proliferation of arms, porous borders, poverty, relative deprivation, and farmers' and herders' conflicts are presented as drivers of the conflict.

Consequently, many Christian communities are becoming soft spots for violent attacks because of the lack of government's failure to nib the crisis in the bud. Their susceptibility is worsened with an utter deprivation of basic amenities such as good access roads, potable water, hospitals, schools, etc. Christians are subjected to the Sharia law, mob killings, forceful conversion to Islam, violent extremism, kidnappings, rape, child labour, human trafficking, and other human rights-related abuses. But the various arms and tiers of the government have shown complacency amid the increasing rate of these forms of violations against Christians.

The complexity of the persecution of Christian in Northern Nigeria lies in the fact that both federal and state governments' resources are instrumentalized against Christians living in cities and local communities across the region. This is because more than 70% of office positions at the federal, state, and local levels are occupied by Muslims. This has made equal access to job opportunities and resource allocations almost impossible.

During employment exercises, Muslims are highly favoured even without having the requirements while Christians who have the requirements are denied job opportunities.

The political atmosphere of Northern Nigeria is tense, taking into cognizance the number of political and religious violence. States like Kano, Sokoto, Kaduna and Zamfara have not been able to separate the affairs of the government from Islamic doctrines. It has also not been able to regulate the violent and extremist preaching by some Islamic clerics. These have made the persecution of Christians and the imposition of some Islamic laws in the region thrive. of Islamic laws on Christians residing in the states. Generally, practicing Christianity in Northern Nigeria is difficult considering the historical, socio-cultural, and political circumstances in the region. As a result, the region was chosen as the location for the project.

Against the backdrop of these challenges, The Kukah Centre designed a project aimed at collecting evidence of Christian persecution in Northern Nigeria. The project which aligns with one of its core values of Memory Preservation, Advocacy, and Knowledge Promotion seeks to:

- Provide reliable evidence on the facts about the persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria.
- Provide more accurate, context-based & fuller pictures of the situation of religious persecutions in Northern Nigeria, as well as the immediate and remote drivers of conflict.
- And to support local faith-based networks to collect documentation on atrocities against their communities and others.

It is important to gather evidence on the persecution of Christians for proper documentation and robust confrontation with the government on how best to address these current challenges.

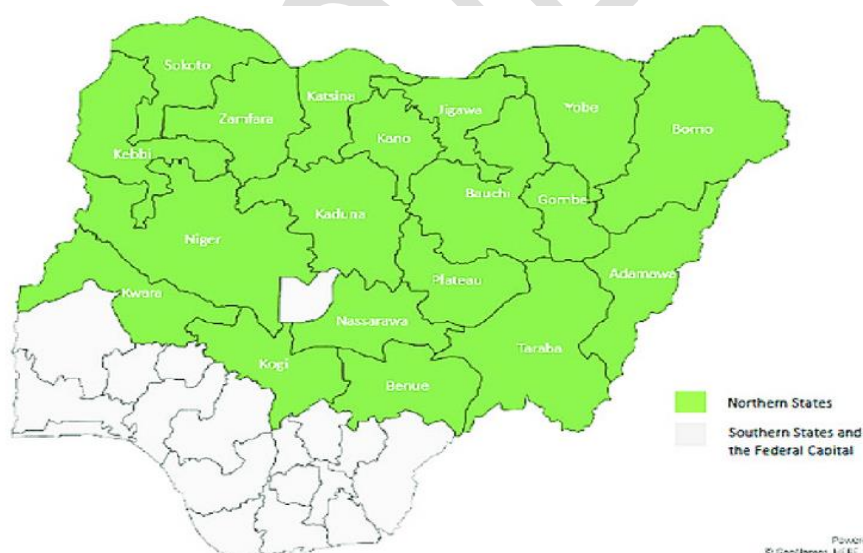
METHODOLOGY

This research adopted a mixed methodology – quantitative and qualitative research. The data collection methodology deployed acknowledged the importance of faith-based local networks and community-centred information in gathering primary data. Thus, three (3) expert researchers, who understand the context of the research subject, and have established contacts with faith-based organisations across the Northeast, Northwest, and Northcentral Nigeria, worked with the project Manager to collect and document incidents of attacks monthly. This was augmented with desk research by four (3) Research Experts from The Kukah Centre. As an escalation strategy designed to amplify the plight of victims, and to support a wider advocacy-led intervention, the project worked with (2) External

Consultants from the US to disseminate findings from research and produce articles and papers that speak to the issues of persecution and religious freedom in Northern Nigeria.

CONTEXT

The formation of the Sokoto Caliphate was a result of the Jihad (Holy war) fought by Usman Danfodio in the 19th Century. With the radical ideology of Jihad and his teeming warriors, Danfodio was able to ‘conquer’ what now constitutes Northern Nigeria. This historical event gave birth to Islamic dominance that has spread across Northern Nigeria. Though greeted with resistance, Christianity was able to thrive with the help of the missionaries who built schools, churches, and social and health infrastructure across the region. However, for decades now, contemporary Northern Nigeria continues to witness the dominance of Islam displayed (by Muslims) in a manner that stifles and undermines the freedom of Christian worship.



Source: ResearchGat

Boko Haram, ISWAP, and extremist Muslims have couched their ideologies on this historical background (and the extremist interpretation of the Quran) to advance the course of Islamic dominance which consequently leads to Christian persecution in Northern Nigeria. Within this context, the separation of the state and religion (Islam) has been impossible. An average Muslim strongly believes that (against any religion, especially Christianity), state structures must be instrumentalized to promote Islam in the North. Largely, these have been the drivers of Christian persecution in Northern Nigeria.

Within this context, Christian indigenous farmers in Northcentral Nigeria find it difficult to carry out agricultural activities because Fulani herdsmen attacks are driven by an ideological thrust of universal ownership of lands across the Sahel Region, as opposed to state ownership and legislations such as the anti-open grazing law in states like Benue. To this effect, many Christians (in states like Benue, Plateau and Nasarawa) have been displaced from their ancestral homes and are living in IDP camps and neighbouring host communities.

In the Northwest, banditry and kidnapping have become organised crimes targeted at religious and traditional leaders. Ransom paid to perpetrators is used to generate funds for the acquisition of arms in furtherance of the actualisation of Fulani dominance of the Nigerian state. The intrusion of Boko Haram into some Christian communities in Northeast Nigeria continues almost daily. With a rise in insecurity across the region, security mechanisms adopted by the government remain the same. There is a denial on the part of the government and the military that it is complacent and overwhelmed with terrorist activities in the country.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS FROM DOCUMENTATION

Findings from the research reports (in Q1, Q2 and Q3 respectively) show that there is a consistent pattern of attacks on Christians and minority groups across the geopolitical zones.

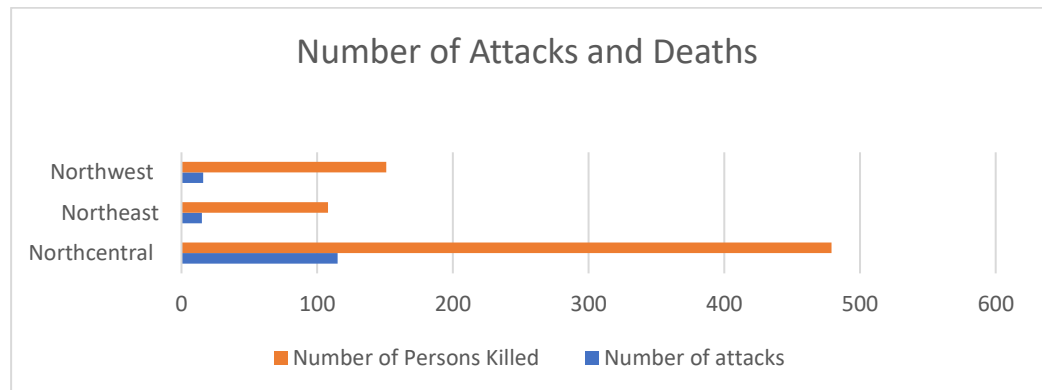
Fulani herdsmen attacks on Christian communities in the Northcentral persist due to the lack of functional migratory laws, increased armed acquisition by herdsmen, and the lack of security presence especially in rural communities, and as a reaction to the ban on anti-grazing laws in some states like Benue. Tagging these attacks as a conflict between Fulani herders and indigenous farmers is but concealing the true religious dimensions of the attacks.

Terrorist activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP in the Northeast still affect Christian communities more. However, there are also cases of attacks by Fulani herdsmen in some communities like Suntai village in Taraba.

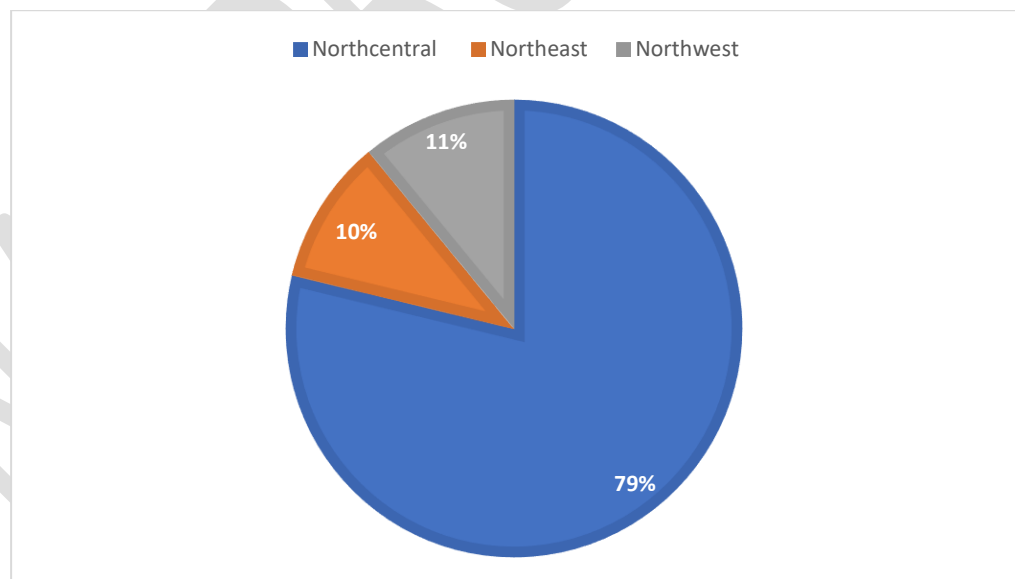
Banditry and Kidnapping have become prevalent in the Northwest because of a lack of government control and the absence of security in some rural Christian minority communities where the forceful conversion of Christian girls is also ongoing.

First Quarter (February 1, 2022 – May 31, 2022)

Breakdown of Attacks Deaths According to Regions



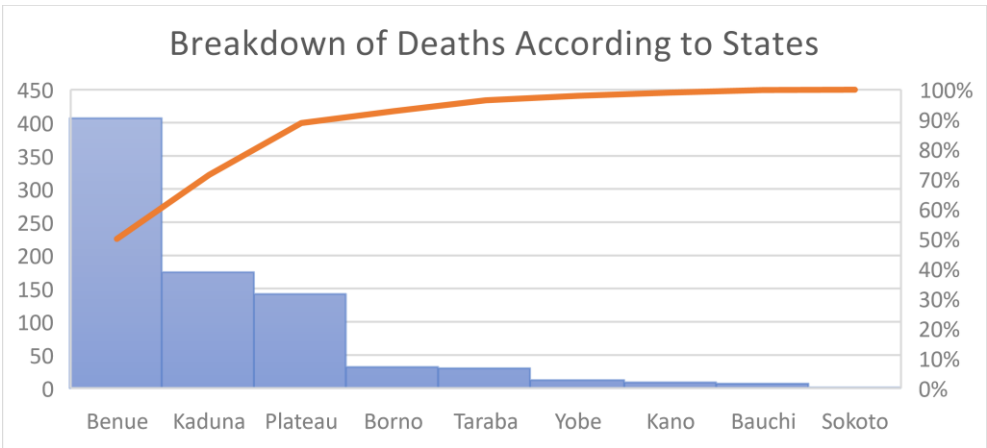
Percentages of Documented Attacks



Analysis: Each region has a particular category of attacks. Fulani herdsmen attacks are prevalent in the Northcentral, Islamic terrorism in the Northeast, banditry, and kidnapping in the Northwest. Due to the abundance of fertile land occupied by Christians in the Northcentral part of Nigeria, a spate of attacks has been ongoing to displace Christians and take over their lands. Terrorist activities in the Northeast mostly affect resettled communities

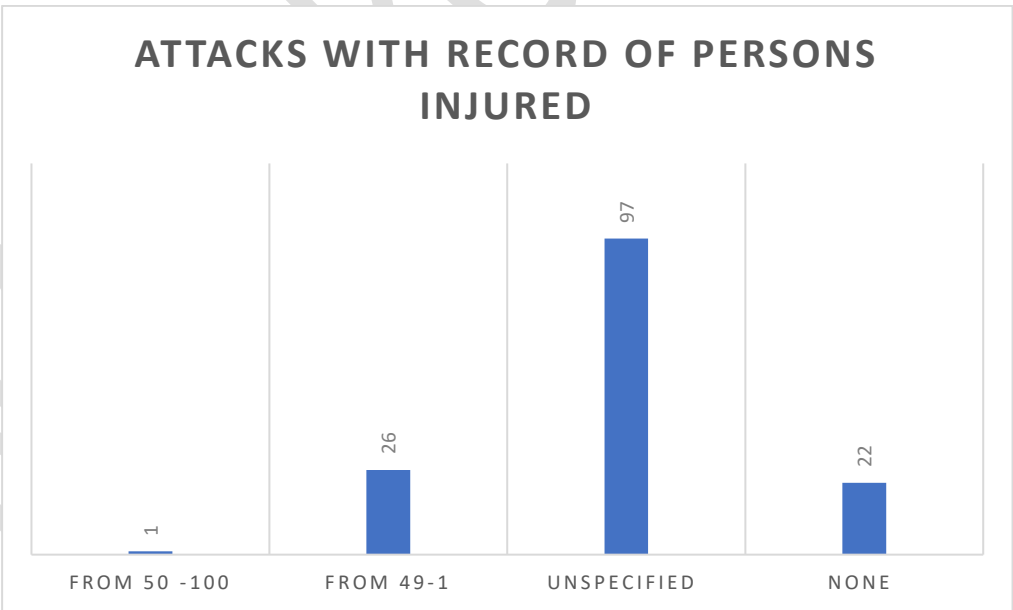
while banditry, mob killings and forceful conversion to Islam takes the centre stage in the Northwest.

Breakdown of Deaths According to States



Analysis: Attacks in states Northcentral states have been prevalent because they are Christian majority states. The narrative is that Christians in these states are targeted to usurp their rich and fertile lands but also as a strategy to take hold of their resources.

Injuries Recorded from documented attacks



From the 146 attacks documented, 1 incidence recorded that at least 50 persons were killed, while 26 incidences recorded that at least one person was injured. 97 attacks recorded that an unspecified number of persons were missing while 22 recorded none.

Attacks have resulted in the displacement of persons and destruction of households

Thousands of houses and properties were destroyed from the 146 attacks recorded in Q1.

- About 200 houses were burnt on Sunday 20th March 2022 from the attack by suspected Fulani militia in Agban in Kagoro Chiefdom, Kaura Local Government of Kaduna State
- In Kaduna state, bandits have attacked and displaced people from the following villages - Tama I, Zangon Tama II, Dillalai, Igaga, Unguwar Bakko, Barere, Tsaunin Mayo, Gidan Gajere, Unguwar Gona, Hayin Kauwa, Unguwar Dan galadima and Zagezage. It is pertinent to note that these villages had over 5000 people who were living in them, who have all been displaced by the bandits as of the time of filing this report.
- Violence erupted in Warji town, headquarters of Warji Local Government Area of Bauchi State, on 20 May 2022 following an alleged blasphemous statement against Islam by a 40-year-old lady, Rhoda Jatau, a staff of the health department of the local government council. That resulted in the burning of 13 houses and the destruction of shops belonging to Christians.
- Suspected terrorist attacked 6 communities in Giwa Local Government.¹ During the raid, houses and cars were burnt and cattle were also rustled. The police in the state were still investigating and accounting for the number of casualties, affected persons, and properties destroyed.

Findings from the documentation show that the persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria is consistently carried out in a coordinated form. This is even worse in Northcentral Nigeria occupied by many Christians. Responses from the government at all levels have been poor. Thus, the government is found to have been complacent which suggests that these attacks will continue unabated.

Largely, Fulani herdsmen activities in the Northcentral region are a form of terrorism aimed at killing Christians and not a conflict between Christian indigenous farmers.

Contrary to popular opinion and the news circulating in the media, the attacks on Christian communities are attributed to different factors, religion continues to play a significant role in the sustenance of conflict in Northern Nigeria. Christians have been disproportionately targeted both in terms of marginalization, exclusion, and physical violence. For instance, a member of the vigilante group in Zango Kataf and survivor of a terrorist attack,

¹ TVC News (2022) 50 Persons Murdered, others Kidnapped by Terrorists in Kaduna
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s60UsE6fXZQ>

whose name will be withheld for security reasons, disclosed that the terrorists who attacked his community were seen in Hilux vans shouting ‘Allahu Akbar’ while shooting.² That day, about 42 persons were killed and over 300 houses were razed.³ The attacks did not in any way suggest that it was a conflict between Fulani herdsman and indigenous farmers. Another survivor of the attack gives an eyewitness account:

“My [wife and I] lived in Zagon Tama, Giwa Local Government. For about three years, kidnappers and bandits have been disturbing us on [a] regular basis, but mostly at night. Because we have been well prepared ourselves, we have consistently repelled them. We have never experienced them coming during the day until last week when they came around 4 pm. They came with over four hundred new bikes. On each bike, there were three persons. So, we are talking about over 1200-armed persons. They killed so many people in broad daylight, and this was actually more shocking to us; it was really unexpected. While the attack was going on, we ran to the priest and begged him to leave the village but he refused, asking why would he run and leave his people. They succeeded in taking the priest around 6 pm. By the time the priest was taken, the bandits had killed over 40 people”

In Benue state, no fewer than 23 persons have been killed by suspected Fulani herders in the Mbadwem and Tiortyu communities of Guma and Tiortyu Local Government Areas. The attack which occurred on Monday, 11th April 2022, came barely after two weeks when 3 persons, including a pastor, were murdered by the same Fulani herdsman on 29th March 2022, at Waku village. Pastor John Torbee Ajav was shot by Fulani herdsman on his way to attend a religious function in Gbajimba LGA. The governor of the State described the attacks on some communities in the state as ethnic cleansing of the Tiv nation (who are predominantly Christians) by Fulani Muslims, blaming the government for neglecting his people:

“We are law-abiding citizens; we have cried for help against these invaders, but nothing is forthcoming... We are left alone, and it looks like it is a deliberate strategy. Now we have only one option; to defend ourselves or get extinct”

From these findings, the attacks on Christian communities in parts of Northcentral Nigeria have little or nothing to do with clashes between indigenous farmers and Fulani. This narrative is projected to stifle the religious persecution of Christians in Northern Nigeria.

² Channels Television News (2021) Chaotic Week in Zango Kataf: 42 Reported Killed, Over 300 Houses Razed By Gunmen (access: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v7i1exmfoB0>)

³ ibid

⁴ Channels Television (2022) 23 Locals Killed in Fresh Attacks on Two Benue Communities, Updated 12th April, 2022. Retrieved 18th April 2022. Access: <https://www.channelstv.com/2022/04/12/23-locals-killed-in-fresh-attacks-on-two-benue-communities/>



5 persons were killed in Tse-Alashi-Kwenev in Kaambe an outstation of Agasha Parish, Guma LGA, Benue State on May 22, 2022. Source: A Local Mobilizer working with Northcentral Coordinator from Benue State.



The remains of Deborah shortly after she was lynched by a Muslim mob in Sokoto. Source: darkstar6971/Nairaland Forum

Christians in Northwest Nigeria are victims of mob actions often tagged as blasphemy which has led to the deaths of many.⁵ Reports show that between 2019 and 2020, more than 190 people were murdered extra-judicially in Sokoto. This is similar in some other parts of north-west Nigeria like Kano. For instance, in June 2016, an angry mob in Kano beheaded a Christian, Bridget Agbahwe for allegedly blaspheming Prophet Mohammed. It was

⁵ All Africa (2021) Nigeria: Containing Increasing Cases of Jungle Justice in THISDAY NEWSPAPER Available at: <https://allafrica.com/stories/202110120348.html> Accessed: May 13 2022.

reported that Bridget, 74 years old, who was a trader in domestic plastic wares at Wambai market in Kano had a disagreement bordering on religion with some traders. The angry mob decided to behead her and attempted to kill her husband.

The most recent of this mob action was the killing of a Christian lady, Deborah Yakubu from Repa Local Government Area of Kebbi State, an N.C.E 2 student under the Department of Home Economics. Deborah was stoned and burnt to death by some aggressive Muslim course mates for alleged blasphemy against Prophet Mohammad. This happened on 12th May 2022.

Findings from the documentation also reveal that forceful conversion of persons to Islam is ongoing in some communities in the Northwest. In Rano Local Government Area of Kano, a twelve-year-old girl was taken away from her guardians by the Hisbah (an Islamic Security Association) and converted into Islam because her guardians punished her for stealing. Two other similar cases have been taken up by the Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, and were in court at the time of compiling this report.

Christian minorities are denied jobs and freedom of worship, and the government has deliberately refused to provide basic amenities to Christian communities

An interview with a Hausa Christian in Kano reveals that Christian minorities in the state are victims of persecution in the aspect of state employment, religious freedom, and the provision of basic amenities. He decries the level of persecution they face:

The issue of jobs in Kano and Nigeria at large is a national problem. However, our case is so obvious in Kano. We hardly get employed (sic) unless we use someone, or you know someone that knows someone, who knows someone or has the hidden opportunity. However, openly or plainly, Hausa Christians cannot be given a job in government sectors through mere interview....We only benefit from infrastructural facilities through our neighbors, that is our Muslim brethren. But it's hard to see Hausa Christian-dominated areas with good roads, and clean water; whether tap or borehole water. Unless they are mixed with Muslims. I know many villages in Tudun Wada LGA in Sumaila, Kibiya, and the rest of them that don't have electricity, good water, and good road, just because they are Christians. Christians in some local governments in kano are facing challenges to freedom of worship, we have a series of reports on attacks on our people in their places of worship. Local governments like Sumaila, Kibiya Garko, and others have experienced many trials regarding their faith.

Christian religious leaders have become targets for kidnappings: The Northwest Regional Coordinator of the Project, Stephen Ojapah was kidnapped by unknown gunmen.

Within the period of this documentation, 7 priests in Northwest Nigeria were kidnapped in different incidences, and one died as a result. Fr. Joseph Danjuma Shekari of St. Monica's Catholic Church, Ikulu Parish, in Kauru LGA was kidnapped on Sunday 6th of February 2022 at his residence. Fr. Joseph Aketeh of St. John Catholic Church, Kudenda, Kaduna South LGA, was kidnapped in an attack in the early hours of the morning on 8 March 2022. It was reported that the gunmen invaded the parish house in the early hours of Tuesday and shot the gateman to death, before heading to the main building where Fr Joseph was residing and kidnapped him. Fr Joseph died in the custody of his abductors on 11th May 2022 after spending about two months.

A priest of the Catholic Diocese of Zaria, Rev Fr Felix Zakari Fidson, alongside other persons was abducted on the 24th of March shortly after leaving the Parish residence located at Zango Tana II, in Zaria LGA. Fr. Felix spent thirty-seven (37) days in captivity before he was released on 3rd March 2022. Also, on 27th March Fr Leo Raphael Ozigi, the parish priest of St. Mary's Catholic Church in Sarkin Pawa, was abducted along with 27 villagers. Fr Leo was returning to his place of residence in Christ the King Parish, Gwada, after the celebration of the Holy Mass when he was kidnapped.

Fathers Stephen Ojapah (MSP) and Oliver Okpara were kidnapped at the parish house of St Patrick's Church, Gidan Maikambo in Katsina on the 25th of May 2022 by unknown gunmen suspected to be armed Fulani. Incidentally, Fr Stephen Ojapah is the Northwest Regional Coordinator of the project. His abductors are demanding a ransom of 100 million Naira (approximately 241, 000 Dollars).

There are two reasons why religious leaders have become targets for abduction. Firstly, it's an attempt to extort money from the church by holding religious leaders as hostages until their ransom is paid. This is so because perpetrators have the perception that the Church has the financial capacity to pay the ransom on behalf of its priests. Secondly, it's outright persecution against Christians. Thus, they have adopted this strategy to instill fear in religious leaders to hinder them from continuing their religious functions in the region.

The responses of the government to these frequent attacks and other related issues on Christian persecution have been slow, unsustainable, and unyielding.

A major reason why these attacks continue to take place is a result of the poor responses of the government. Some of the short-term unyielding responses have been setting up military checkpoints that are usually operational during the day. This strategy was deployed especially in southern

Kaduna when Fulani Muslims invaded some communities in Giwa and Kaura local government areas and killing about 32 persons and destroying over 300 households. This has not solved the problem as armed Fulani continue to attack Christian communities in the absence of the military.

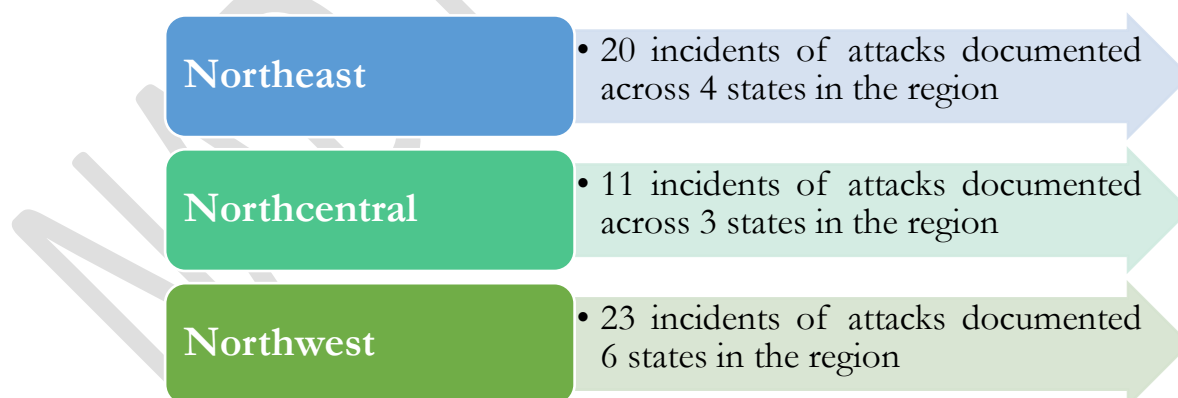
Another unyielding short-term response to these attacks is site visits after attacks. In January 2022 for example, a delegation from the Kaduna state government with the joint team of Heads of Security headed by the Commissioner for Internal Security of the state, Samuel Arwan visited Kaura and Giwa LGAs to commensurate with victims and survivors of attacks. There, he assured the victims and survivors of the state government's efforts in addressing security issues. Despite this, Christian communities in the state are been attacked continuously.

Most worrisome is the fact that the government has deliberately refused to recognize that these attacks targeted at Christians are religiously motivated. There is more attention to providing analysis of these attacks from the viewpoint of climate change, cultural clash, and economic contestation.

Second Quarter (June 1, 2022 – September 30, 2022)

Within the period of documentation, thirty-seven (37) incidents of attacks were recorded across the region, of which 316 persons were killed and thousands were displaced from their homes.

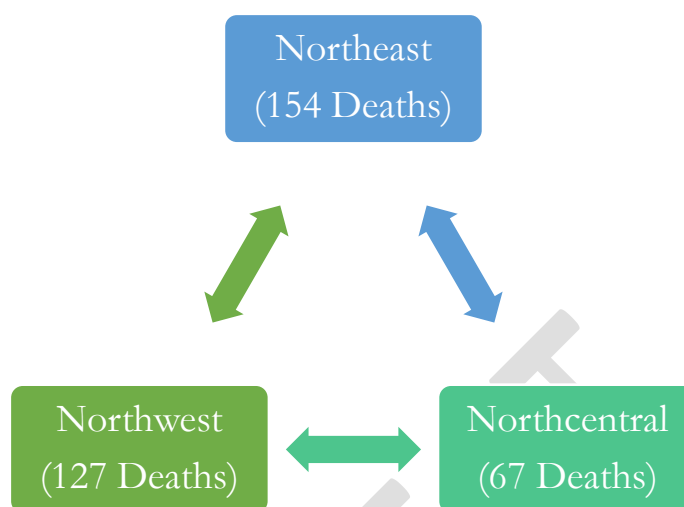
Documented Incidents of Attacks within Q2 (July 1 – September 30, 2022)



Violent attacks of non-state actors (ISWAP and Boko Haram) in Northeast Nigeria led to the death of 154 persons while in the northcentral, attacks on indigenous Christian farmers by Fulani herdsmen led to the death of 64 persons.

In the Northwest, there is a rise in banditry and silent, non-violent persecution of indigenous Hausa Christians as well as Christians who have settled in the region for civil service and business. A total of 127 persons were killed by armed Fulani bandits within the period of documentation.

Documented Number of Persons Killed Between July 1 – September 30, 2022

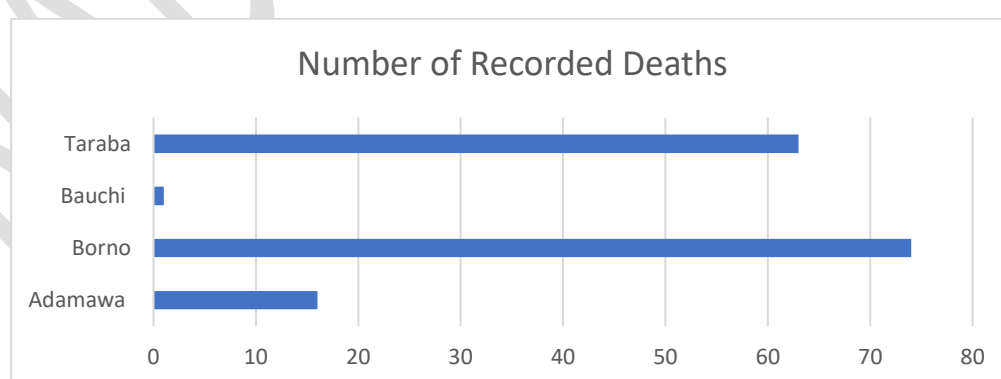


Comparatively, the number of persons killed is highest in the Northeast which suggests that activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen and bandits have a huge impact on the lives of victims. In the Northcentral part, herdsmen continue to attack indigenous farmers with little or no help from security operatives.

Although there are variations according to the three regions in terms of who the perpetrators of these atrocities are, the major victims are Christians and minority groups. Similarly, the mode of operations and the motives behind these attacks are identical.

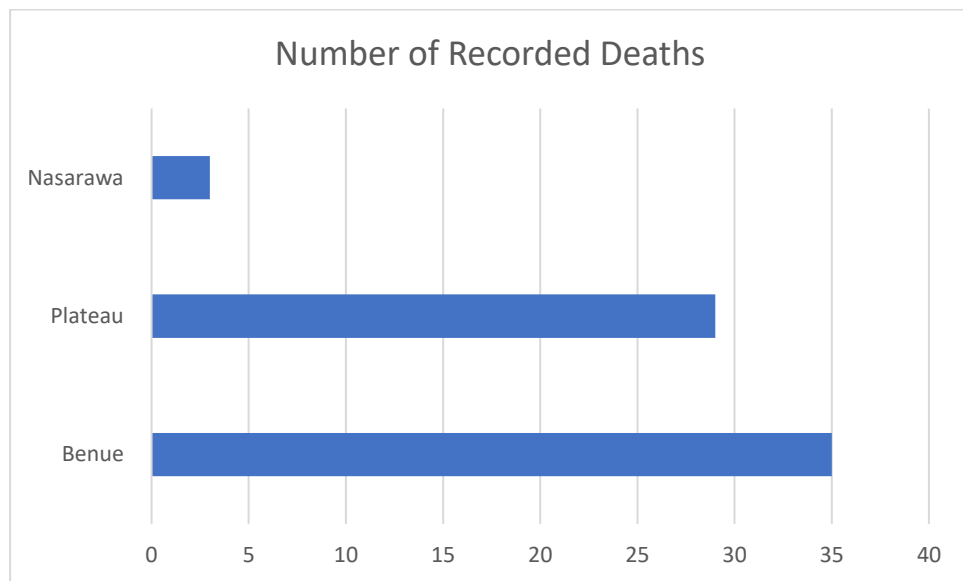
Disaggregated Number of Deaths Per State of the Regions

Northeast



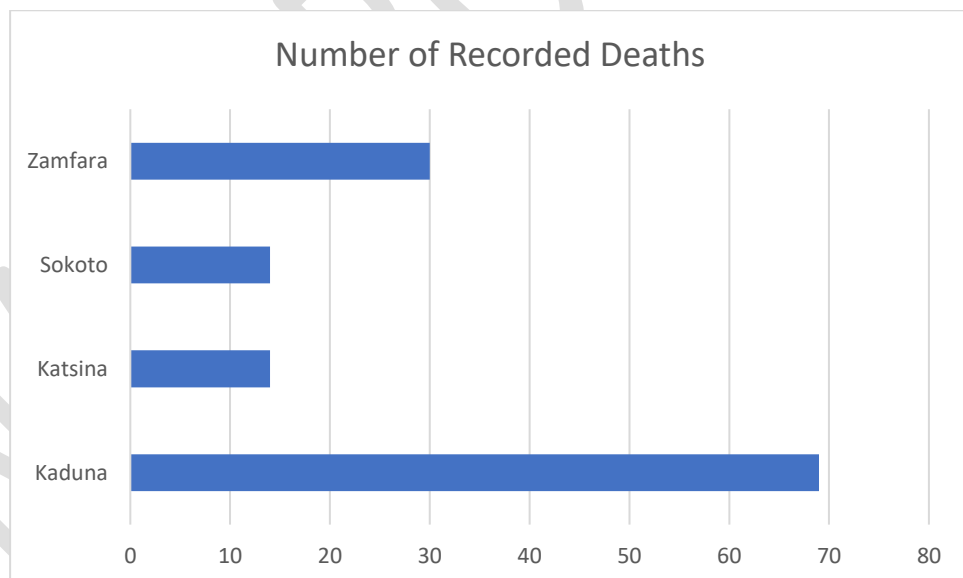
Atrocities recorded in Northeast Nigeria were perpetrated by Boko Haram, ISAWP, Fulani herdsmen, bandits and unknown gunmen. The Chart above shows that the violent activities of Boko Haram and ISWAP in the region are strong (especially in Borno) as their operations led to the death of 154 persons.

Northcentral



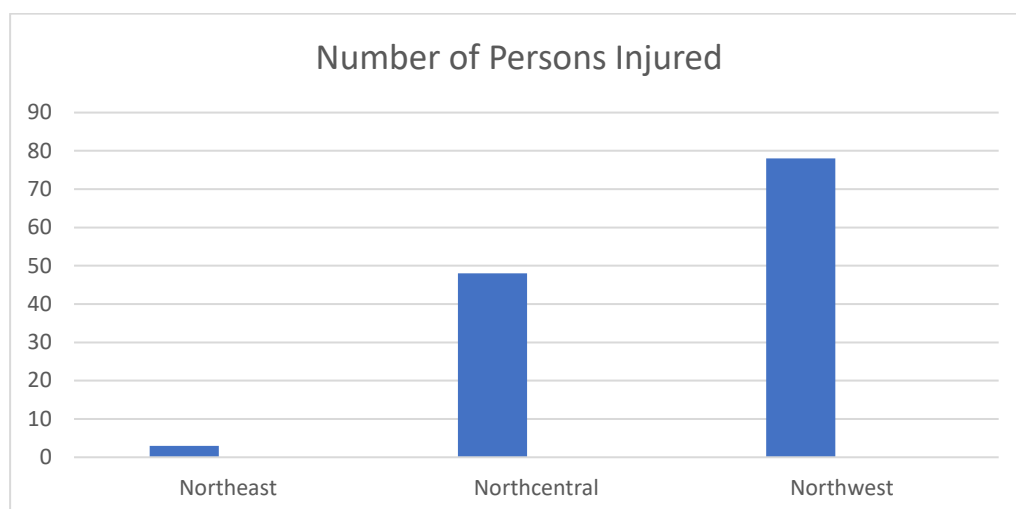
In Northcentral Nigeria, Plateau and Benue are the epic centres of Fulani herdsmen attacks. These attacks exist because of religious motives and the attempt to grab the fertile lands in the region.

Northwest



Banditry has deeply eaten the socio-economic fabric of North-western Nigeria. Southern Kaduna continues to witness unceasing attacks that have killed many and left thousands homeless. This is coupled with systemic persecution faced by Christians working with the government, students studying in public institutions and businessmen and businesswomen in the states like Sokoto and Zamfara.

Documented Number of Persons Injured Persons between July 1 – September 30, 2022.



A total of 139 persons were injured across the three regions. While this report acknowledges the fact that it could not ascertain the exact number of persons injured, it was able to document incidents that had figures of persons injured. For instance, 13 incidents of attacks recorded within the period of this documentation had an unidentified number of persons injured.

There are largely two categories of atrocities committed against Christians in Northern Nigeria. The violent aspect of the persecution is perpetrated by the likes of Boko haram, ISWAP, Fulani herdsmen, bandits, and unknown gunmen – a political nomenclature that attempts to hide the identity of perpetrators.

On the other hand, there is a systemic, non-violent approach to Christian persecution orchestrated by individuals in key positions that bridge Christians' fundamental human rights concerning freedom of worship, acquisition of lands and access to equal opportunities.

Armed Fulani herdsmen continue to attack Christian Communities and religious leaders, killing many and going scot-free

⁶Herdsmen have killed 60 Persons in Taraba and displaced about 120,000 and many properties were destroyed within two months of the continuous attacks on Ussa, part of Takum and Yangtu development areas of Taraba State by suspected herdsmen.

⁶ The Tribune Newspaper. (2022) 'Herdsmen Kill 60 Persons in Taraba, Displaced 120000 in Two Months' Available at: <https://tribuneonline.ng/herdsmen-killed-60-persons-in-taraba-displaced-120000-in-two-months-lawmaker/> (Accessed 22 July, 2022)

These attacks do not suggest a conflict between Fulani herdsmen and indigenes of Taraba – who are 90% Christians – over land resources, as often projected by the government and secular INGOs, blocs and research institutions.

If anything, they reveal the level of unchecked religious extremism exhibited by Fulani herdsmen to depopulate Christians in the state and take hold of its resources for the advancement of Fulani cum Islamic dominance in Northern Nigeria and even beyond.



Victims of Fulani attacks in Bauchi State. Source: Northeast Local Network

Similarly, Fulani herdsmen invaded the residence of Rev. Daniel Umaru of the *Ekklesiyan Yanuwa a Nigeria* (EYN) (translated in English as Evangelical Church of the Brethren in Nigeria) in Mubi Local Government Area of Adamawa State, killing his two sons and abducting his 13-year-old daughter. During the incident which occurred on Tuesday 7 July 2022 around 2:00 GMT, they shot him and his two sons, who died instantly from the gunfire.



Burial of Rev Danial's sons in Mubi, Adamawa State. Source: Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Facebook Page

Furthermore, Fulani herdsmen attacked two communities in Plateau, Northcentral Nigeria on the 31st of July 2022 where seven persons were confirmed dead at Danda Chugwi, Vwang in Jos South Local Government Area following an attack by Fulani Militias. The attack happened on Sunday at about 9:00 pm which led to the loss of lives of seven persons – Pam Gyang Dawho (59 years), Nvou Pam Gyang (43 years), Jah Dung Pam (50 years), Ruth Gyang Bot (16 years), Chundung Pam Gyang (9 years), Mercy James Gyang (12 years) and Benjamin Pam Gyang (5 years).



The body of Mercy Pam, a 9-year-old victim of Fulani herdsmen attack. Photo Credit: Northcentral Local Network



A victim of a Fulani herdsmen attack lies lifeless in Jos, Northcentral Nigeria. Photo Credit: Northcentral Local Network

Two persons were injured during that attack – Lyop John Dung (40 years) and David Pam Gyang (4 months baby) whose hand was amputated by the attackers. The injured were taken to Vom Christian hospital where they were treated.



Picture of David Pam Gyang, 4 months old baby whose hand was amputated by Fulani herdsmen. Photo Credit: Northcentral Local Network



A woman and her son stand beside their house razed by fire from attacks by Fulani herdsmen. Photo: Northcentral Local Network

The August Narrative Report from the Northcentral Coordinator explains the motive behind the attacks thus:

The motive behind the attack is not unconnected with the fact that the Fulani Militia was trying to frighten the community so that they will flee and abandon the community so that they can occupy and rename it in their interest. However, community resilience prevailed as they resisted any compulsion and decided to remain in their ancestral land by resigning their fate to God.

This suggests that these communities are left to their fate without succour from security operatives. It also explains why such attacks have been recurring because there is no sustainable security mechanism adopted by the government to address these challenge that has been on for decades.



Leftover of destroyed grains during an attack in Mangu LGA, Plateau State. Photo: Northwest Local Network

The religious dimension of the existing conflict in Northern Nigeria holds sway over narratives tied to economic competition, climate change or porosity of borders. Strongly connected to the religious motive behind these

attacks is the plan for ethnic cleansing of Christian-dominated groups like the TIV in Benue and Birom in Plateau, all in Northcentral Nigeria.

Christian minorities in Northwest Nigeria face non-violent persecution by state-institutions

The persecution of Christians in Northwest Nigeria has a non-violent dimension that presents states in the region as peaceful and accommodating for Christians and minority groups.⁷

On the 27th of July 2022, a victim of persecution in Mabera (Southern part of Sokoto) whose name is withheld for security reasons disclosed how he has been denied his promotion severally, while his Muslim colleagues have gone way ahead of him. Similarly, on the 28th of May 2022, a Christian was evicted from her residence in Sabon Gari, Illela Local Government Area of Sokoto State because she was the only Christian living in the area. Report from the local network in Northwest Nigeria gives a general outlook of Sokoto as a peaceful state with ongoing systemic persecution happening within the state:

⁸The nonviolent cases in Sokoto State have been very well hidden over the years, thereby presenting Sokoto as a peaceful state. If peace means denying a Christian his right to worship freely and live in certain areas freely without complaining, then Sokoto is a peaceful place to be. If the reverse is the case, Sokoto and the likes of such States in the Northwest are not peaceful: Jigawa, Yobe, Zamfara, Kano etc.

This systemic persecution seemed to have come to stay for the fact that state institutions have been instrumentalized to sustain the course of Islamic dominance in the region. Christians and other minority groups have thus become second-class citizens in their country.

There is a continuously high rate of kidnapping in Northwest Nigeria

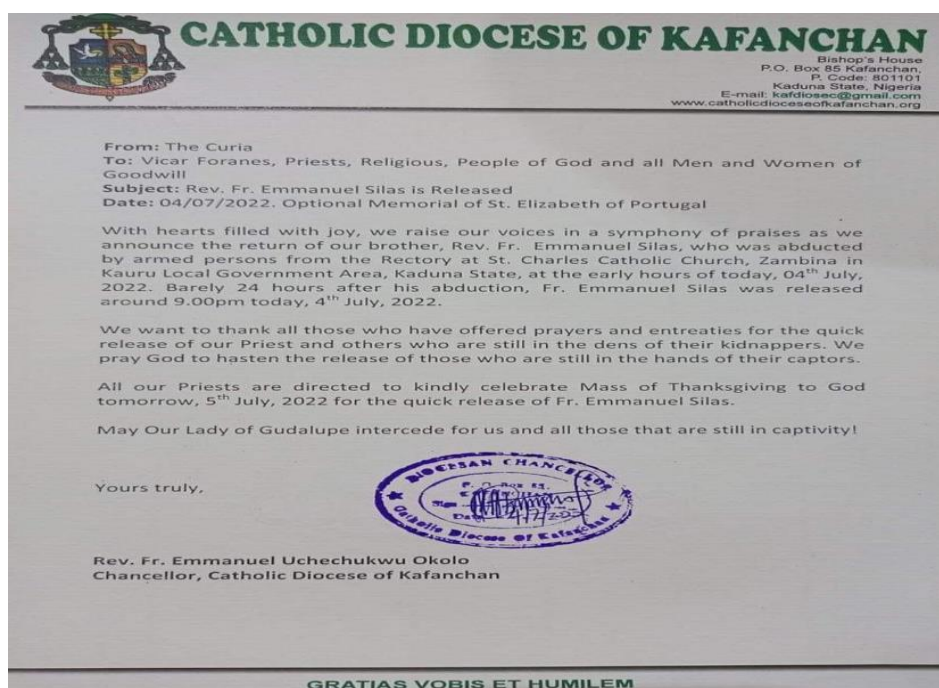
Kidnapping and the demands for huge ransoms have become the order of the day in Northern Nigeria. This criminal act is associated with bandits who are identified as Fulani armed men. In Northwest Nigeria, a total of 79 persons were reported to have been kidnapped including religious leaders within the second quarter of this project. The trend circulating on social media is the kidnapping of religious leaders, especially priests.

Since the beginning of 2022, not less than 18 Catholic priests were abducted by armed Fulani bandits across the country. 80% of these abductions occurred in Northwest Nigeria.

⁷ Narrative Report from Sokoto (2022) Nigerian Atrocities Documentation Project

⁸ Narrative Report from Sokoto (2022) Nigerian Atrocities Documentation Project

Within the period of documentation, three Catholic priests were abducted. Reverend Fr Emmanuel Silas was kidnapped on the 4th of July 2022 but was released on the 5th of July 2022. Similarly, on the 15th of July, two Catholic priests, Fathers John Mark and Donatus Cleopas were kidnapped in Kafanchan Diocese while on their way to a function in Lere LGA of Kaduna state.



Press Statement on the release of Fr Emmanuel Silas by the Diocese of Kafanchan, Kaduna State

Thousands of persons have been displaced from their homes because of these attacks.

The attacks on communities across the region have led to the displacement of thousands. For instance, on 20 June 2022, ISWAP attacked Madagali ward in Madagali LGA of Adamawa State.

A total of 665 individuals from 133 households were displaced from their communities in Madagali ward to neighbouring localities within the same ward. The majority of those affected are refugees who are initially displaced from Cameroon. The displaced population is currently residing with residents in the host community and needs shelter and food.

Similarly, ⁹not less than 120,000 persons including women and children have been displaced by bandits in some communities of Ussa and Takum LGA of Taraba state. This has also resulted in humanitarian crises in the state.

⁹ Vanguard (2022) Taraba Killings: Over 120,000 displaced from ancestral home —Lawmaker Available at : <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2022/07/taraba-killings-over-120000-displaced-from-ancestral-home-lawmaker/> (Accessed July 27 2022)

This is the same situation in Northwest Nigeria where thousands have been forced to flee their homes due to the violent activities of bandits and Fulani herdsmen

Third Quarter (October 1, 2022 – January 31, 2023)

The 3rd quarter of this project documented 39 occurrences of violent attacks that cut across the three geo-political zones in Northern Nigeria: Northwest, Northeast, and Northcentral.

Northwest

- **7 attacks occurred in 2 states in the region.**

Northcentral

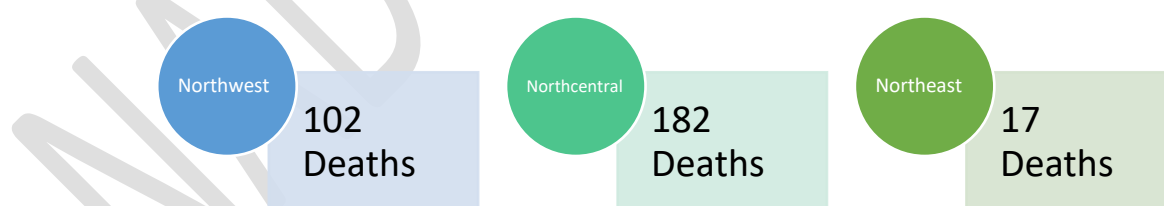
- **29 incidences of attacks were recorded in 6 states in this region**

Northeast

- **3 attacks were carried out in 2 states in the region.**

The data shows that 301 people were killed and over 7000 were displaced from their ancestral homes.¹⁰ In some states such as Plateau, communities were dislodged, and Fulani families were brought and settled in those communities.

Documented Figures of Persons Killed from November 1, 2022-January 31, 2023



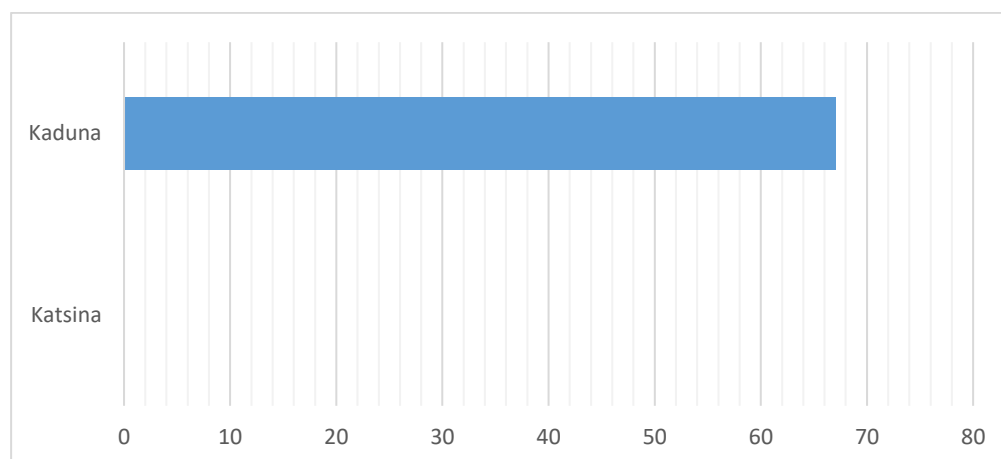
According to the data, activities of non-state actors in the Northwest led to the death of 102 persons and the kidnapping of many people including two pastors, a catechist, and the mother of a catholic priest. In the Northcentral, the attacks by Fulani militia, unknown gunmen, and bandits led to the death of 182 persons. While in the Northeastern region, the uncurbed activities of Boko Haram, Anasuru, ISWAP, and Fulani herdsmen attacks in some parts of Taraba state cost 17 persons their lives.

¹⁰ Narrative Reports from Regional Coordinators (2022) Nigerian Atrocities Documentation Project

Disaggregated Number of Deaths per State of the Regions

Northwest

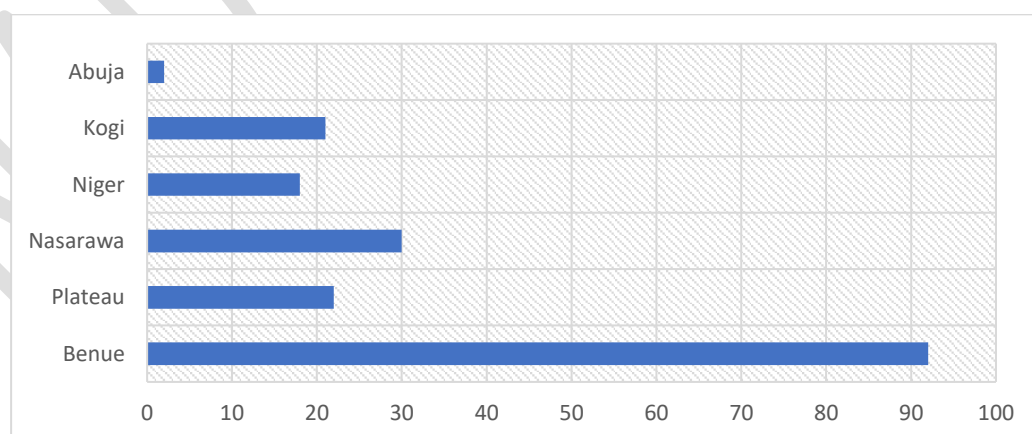
Figures of Deaths Recorded



¹¹Apart from the many killings in the Northwest, what is also notably worrisome is the unrestrained kidnappings for ransom. The Northwest has more recorded reports of kidnappings than other regions. There is a widespread of kidnapping in the region with high demand for prodigious amounts for ransom. The non-violent persecution of Christians like forceful conversion to Islam still persists.

Northcentral

Figures of Deaths Recorded



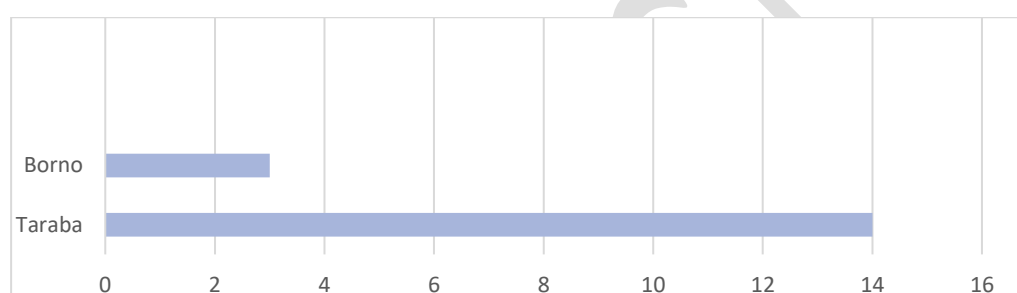
Unlike the previous quarterly reports where more killings were reported from the same two states of Benue, and Plateau, the criminal attacks have

¹¹ Channels TV (2022). Terrorists invasion of Church in Katsina: Available at: [Terrorists Invade Katsina Church, Kidnap 25 Worshippers – Eyewitnesses – Channels Television \(channelstv.com\)](https://www.channelstv.com/news/terrorists-invade-katsina-church-kidnap-25-worshippers-eyewitnesses/) (Accessed January 26, 2023)

spread to virtually the entire region. The Northcentral recorded the highest number of casualties of 182 persons. The criminal activities of Fulani herdsmen and bandits have continued to waste many lives in the region unchallenged. Their crimes have contributed immensely to the food crisis in Nigeria. This is because the Northcentral region, known for food production more than any region in the country, has been infested by killer Fulani herdsmen who kill farmers on their farms and by implication cripple agricultural activities in the region. The motive has always been to dislodge the Christians in the region and occupy the land.

Northeast

Figures of Deaths Recorded



¹²Based on the data gathered, and reports from credible sources like ACN News, the violent activities of non-state actors like Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Ansaru are losing tempo. There has been a decline in the number of persons killed in the Northeast in recent times. Non-state actors continue to lay down their weapons and surrender to government troops. However, the vestiges of terrorist activities in the region are visible, with pockets of attacks targeted at some Christian communities. Specifically, the attacks appear to be occurring more in Taraba state in recent times. This is an indication that the terrorists may have been shifting their base from the far Northeastern state of Borno down to Taraba state.

In the ongoing persecution of Christians and Minority groups in Northern Nigeria, there are areas where their predicaments stand out. Even when some sort of relief is being experienced in some places within the Northern region, the situation in some places is getting worse with no sign of relief in sight.

The precarious situation in Benue state with over 95% Christian population, calls for serious concern. The herdsmen are bent on evicting the entire Christian tribes in the Benue valley and occupy the area. Despite the numerous calls for the intervention of the Federal Government by the Benue state government, Fulani herdsmen still kill freely in Benue state with

¹² ACN News (2022) We have never experienced what we are experiencing.
<https://2nd.acninternational.org/nigeria-we-have...> (Accessed November 20, 2022)

little or no confrontation by the security agencies. For instance, a family of six was killed in Abagana on the 19 of January 2023. The ¹³Fulani killer-men killed 8 persons on that day, six from a family and two others. They beheaded one of the victims and left with his head. These killings and many others occurred despite the formation of a state security guard by the state government to protect the citizens the Federal Government failed to protect.

Fulani militia killed not less than 5 persons in Farin Kasa community in Mangu Local government Area of Plateau state on the eve of Christmas (24, December 2022). These attacks have been ongoing in many parts of Plateau state unrestrained. Hence, citizens were left with little or no option but to enroll in martial arts training. The skills acquired by one Lucy Tapnang of Barkin Ladi helped her to bravely disarm one of her abductors of his AK47 riffle thereby freeing herself and 3 others. A report from the Northcentral coordinator shed light on the situation to such a degree:

No doubt Plateau state has suffered a lot at the hands of terrorists who came in different forms like killer Fulani militia, insurgents, bandits, and a combined force of Hausa-Fulani attackers from 7th September 2001 to this day. Leading to the loss of lives and property worth billions of Naira



One of the victims of Fulani attack in Plateau state on Christmas eve. Photo: Local Network

What continues to be a thing of concern is that, with all the evidence available that these attacks are targeted at certain groups of people in the region, the Federal Government has continued to argue that the crises have no religious connotation.

¹³ Punch Newspapers (2023). 8 killed in Abagana in Benue. Available at: [Suspected bandits attack Benue community, kill eight - Punch Newspapers \(punchng.com\)](https://punchng.com/suspected-bandits-attack-benue-community-kill-eight/) (Accessed January 28, 2023)

Christian Religious Leaders are still targeted by bandits and terrorists.

Christian religious leaders have continued to fall victim to attacks by these non-state actors. For instance, in the last month of this quarter, Rev. Fr. Isaac Achi, the Parish Priest of Saint Peter and Paul Catholic Church Kafin Koro in Niger state was burnt to death in the parish house while his assistant, Fr. Collins Ameh managed to escape with bullet wounds.¹⁴

The killing of Fr. Isaac Achi made it 30 Catholic priests killed by non-state actors in Nigeria in 2022. Also, two pastors and a catechist were kidnapped in Katsina state. A total ransom of 45 million naira was paid to secure their release.



Remains of St Peter and Paul Parish house where Fr. Achi Isaac was burnt to death. (Photo: NC Local Network).

¹⁴ The Nation Newspaper(2023). A Catholic priest burnt to death in Niger. Available at: [Catholic priest burnt to death in Niger | The Nation Newspaper \(thenationonlineng.net\)](https://thenationonlineng.net/catholic-priest-burnt-to-death-in-niger/) (Accessed January 18, 2023)

Non-violent religious persecution of Christians and other minorities persists in the Northwest.

The non-violent persecution of Christian minorities has persisted in the Northwestern region as seen in all the quarterly reports. ¹⁵In Sokoto state, James Ezekiel (a baker) was forced to profess Islam at his place of work. He did not return home for some days and was later found studying in an Islamic school.

The kidnapping of Christians, particularly Christian leaders is ongoing as noted in the previous reports. Christians are kidnapped and demand for humongous amounts to secure their release has held sway in the region. In Katsina state, for instance, Pastor Danhatu Yusuf was kidnapped, and a sum of 28 million naira was paid to secure his release. Also, Pastor Ahmed ECWA was kidnapped and a ransom of 12 million naira was paid before he regained his freedom.

Again, Catechist Ibrahim Sani was kidnapped, and 5 million naira was paid for his ransom. Furthermore, the mother of Fr. Musa Maiyaki, was kidnapped, and her captors demanded 50 million naira before she will be released. She is still in the hands of her captors at the time of documenting this report.

Ancestral homes are deserted as non-state actors continue their carnage unabated

There are thousands of locals who have spent almost a decade in the IDP camps as a result of these attacks. In December 21, 2022, more than 5,000 people were displaced in 12 communities spread across the three local government areas of Lafia, Obi, and Awe in Nasarawa state. The situation is not different in Benue state where thousands have been evicted from their communities, and even at the IDP camps, Fulani Militia has severally attacked and killed many in the camps. The killing of a family of six on 19 January 2023, occurred around the Abagana IDP camp in Makurdi, the Benue state capital. This implies that even at the IDP camps, there are no adequate security measures and so the internally displaced persons are at the mercy of the Fulani Militia

CHALLENGES

With the increasing insecurity in Northern Nigeria (herdsmen attacks, banditry, Boko Haram, ISWAP attacks, etc.) it was challenging for Regional Coordinators to travel to the field and organize formal interviews with groups and key informants. Mindful of this challenge, the Regional

¹⁵ Narrative Report from Sokoto (2022) Nigerian Atrocities Documentation Project

Coordinators devised informal interviews to collect data in order not to raise religious suspicion and be exposed to security risks. Other challenges experienced include:

- **Difficulty in Field Travels for Data Collection:** Considering the frequency of attacks in the region, traveling across the huge land expanse in Northern Nigeria to collect data was a challenge for the Regional Coordinators. However, Regional Coordinators relied on the networks they have established with local individuals and communities to collect and verify data.
- **Unwillingness of victims to talk due to trauma:** Getting first-hand information from victims of violent attacks (as a source of primary data) has been difficult due to their level of trauma. In most cases, victims rejected the request to speak to the regional coordinators and their networks
- **Suspicion that researchers are trading on victim's Misery:** Victims of violent attacks have an erroneous believe that researchers are leveraging their pathetic conditions for monetary gains. This perception makes victims unwilling to share information which consequently makes it difficult for researchers to collect data.
- **Competing Narratives** – Taking into cognizance the diverse interests of many donor-agencies and research-based organisations, there are competing narratives on the drivers and effect of terrorism in Northern Nigeria. For instance, it remains an unpopular fact that the violence unleashed by Non-state actors on Christian communities is tied to religion. Such competing narratives do not provide the opportunity for adequate synergy to tell a positive story.
- **Lack of human face to data collection** – While the project focuses on data collection for advocacy and policy formulation, it has no humanitarian mechanism to address the misery, difficulties and economic challenges of victims.
- Lack of adequate funds to collect more data.

CONCLUSION

There is certainly no gainsaying that Christians in Northern Nigeria have become victims of religious extremism. The atrocities of non-state actors like Boko Haram, founded on a religious ideology, affect Christians more in the region. Consequently, these have devastating economic impacts on victims. Interventions from the government do not match the resulting impact of these atrocities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations can help address the existing challenges of Christian persecution in Northern Nigeria.

Religious Leaders

- Churches and Christian organisations/institutions should organise public lectures or programs (like the popular crusades organised by religious leaders) on the current realities of Christian persecution to amplify the voices of victims and provide counter-narratives to the existing secular narratives of climate change and economic competitions as the causes of these violent conflict.
- Should establish an organization in charge of conducting evidence-based research on the persecution of Christians to create narratives contrary to popular opinions suggesting the attacks on Christians are not religiously motivated. This will drive CAN and other religious leaders to confront the government on the issue of Christian persecution.
- Religious bodies like the Christian Association of Nigeria and the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN) should continue to confront the government on the need to solve the current security challenge while it seeks collaboration with Christian INGOs to offer humanitarian assistance to victims whom the government has not adequately provided relief services.

The Federal Government

- Should constitute an Inter-Religious Commission saddled with the responsibility of handling issues on religious conflicts and persecutions.
- Establish more official Internally Displaced Camps to accommodate persons stranded in conflict-torn areas.
- The government should adopt community-led policing where indigenes and residents of communities are employed, trained, and equipped to secure their environment and communities against non-state actors like Boko Haram
- The existence of indigeneity in Nigeria has advanced the course of religious persecution. Lawmakers should come up with legislation that will promote inclusivity, free access to land, place of worship etc. and equality in the country.

Security Agencies

- The government should adopt community-led policing where indigenes and residents of communities are employed, trained, and equipped to secure their environment and communities against non-state actors like Boko Haram.

International Community

- There is the need to pay more attention to the unpopular religious dimensions of conflict and terrorism which have been jettisoned by economic and political dimensions. This will provide a deeper understanding of the fundamental underlying drivers of conflict and terrorism in Northern Nigeria. This will support the identification of suitable interventions that will address the true source of the conflict rather than the symptoms.

Donor Community – The Hungarian Government

- This project should be sustained by the Hungarian government in everyway possible. First, to ensure that policy formulation on the matters of Christian persecution in Nigeria is informed by evidence and facts. But more importantly, to demonstrate rather urgently that victims are placed at the centre of the project through immediate support initiatives such as direct cash transfers, provision of food, psycho-social support and the provision of livelihoods.

2023 © The Kukah Centre



All Rights Reserved

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means; electronic, mechanic, photocopying, recording, or otherwise without the prior permission of the author who is the copyright holder