

# Nigeria: a country at war?

Ongoing violence and land occupation by Fulani  
in Central and South East Nigeria

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There is no official religious census, but the conventional wisdom indicates that Nigeria is equally divided between Christians and Muslims, each making up a little less than 50% of the population. Catholics represent around one quarter of Christians, while three quarters are Protestant with small numbers of Orthodox or other Christian denominations. The majority of Muslims (around 40%), self-identify as Sunni. Ethnoreligious groups represent around 7.2% of the population.



States with Sharia law in Nigeria. Source: [The Economist](#)

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Muslims are in the majority in most of the northern states (predominantly belonging to the ethnic Hausa-Fulani people) which have adopted Islamic Sharia law. Kaduna and Niger also operate under Sharia although these states are often described as 50% Christian and 50% Muslim. Most central states are also a mix of Christian and Muslim, while the southern states are mainly Christian and animist.



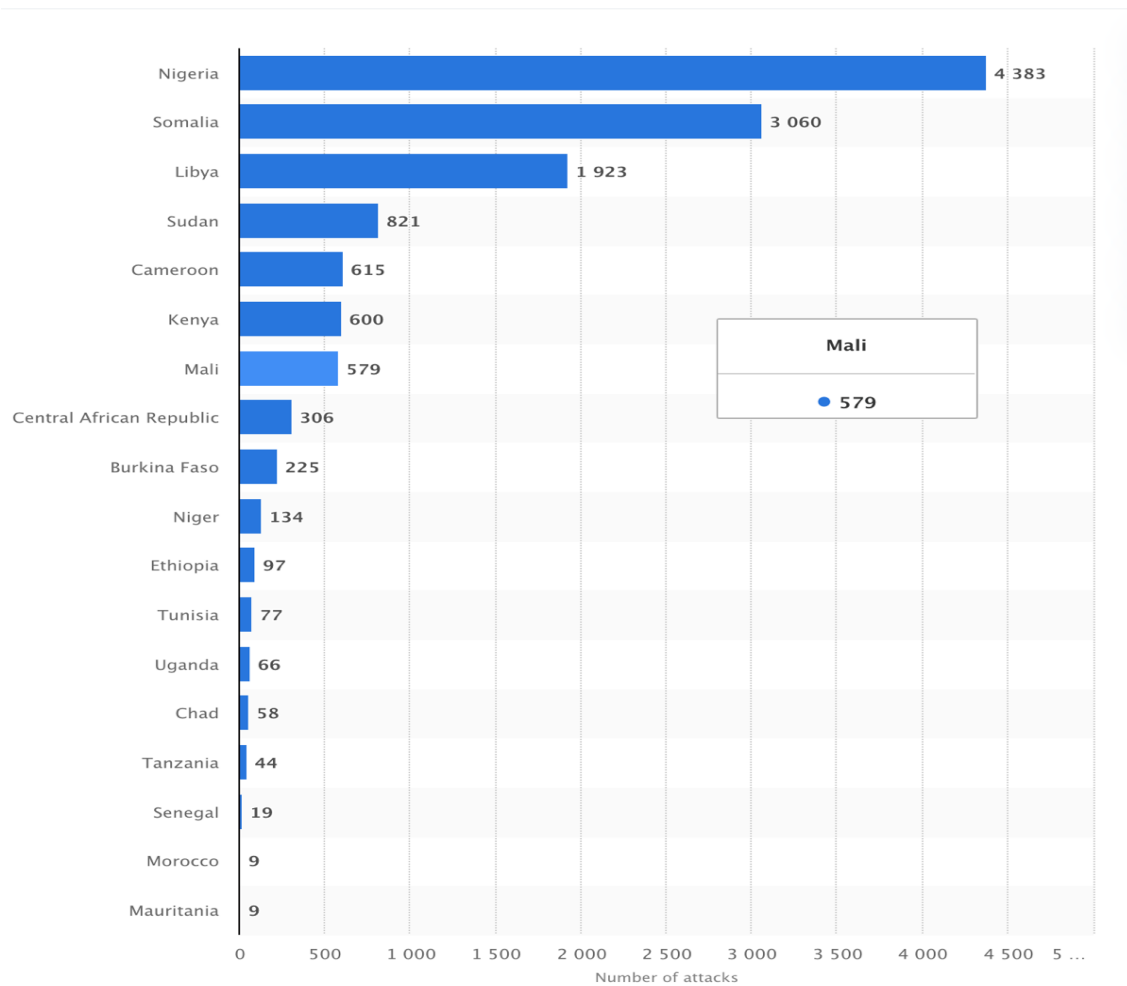
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Violence in Nigeria is intensifying in a multifaceted crisis of security, and the country is locked in a perilous downward spiral. Areas of concern include the Islamist terrorist activity of Boko Haram in the northeast; a long-running militancy and piracy in the Niger Delta; increasing violence of Fulani Islamist herders attacking Christian farming communities in the Middle-Belt and southward, the separatist Biafra movement in the Igbo southeast, and a widespread banditry throughout the country. The government's military response (including the use of self-defense groups) often entails abuses fueling local, community-based violence.

The various conflicts in Nigeria are linked to several factors: **Banditry and piracy** take advantage of the weakness of a highly corrupt state and a general lack of security, as well as the widespread poverty affecting the majority of the population.

**Terrorism**, be it Boko Haram or Fulani Islamists, can be broadly said to be driven by the poor social, cultural and educational condition of the Nigerian population, as well as by political mismanagement and corruption.

Most of the terrorist groups operate in states with a predominantly Muslim population. Local armed groups with local political and economic interests and ambitions are often infiltrated by international terrorism groups such as Al-Qaeda or ISIS, and, incited by Salafist preachers, seek to impose the strictest version of Sharia law on all the inhabitants of the state through violence. In many cases, Muslims and Christians are equally victims of this violence.



Number of terrorist attacks in African countries between 2007 and 2019.

Source: [Statista](#)

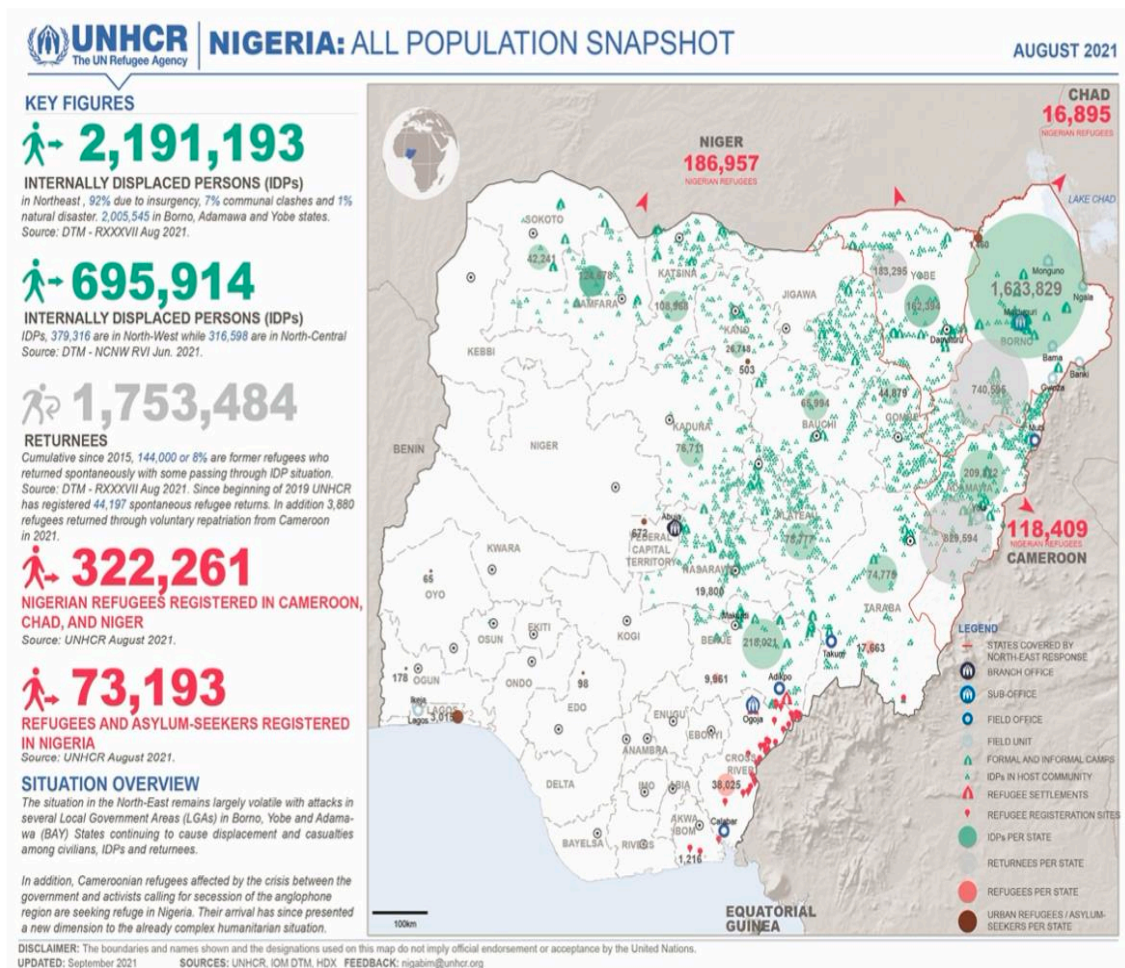
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In the instance of the pastoralist Fulani, who have suffered a reduction in grazing for their cattle in the north of the country for climatic reasons and seek territorial alternatives, many of them have been seduced by the jihadist message as a further incentive to expand their areas of control. These militant herders have invaded the lands of predominantly Christian farmers, murdering, raping and injuring, and ravaging villages and towns, and in so doing provoking a mass departure of Christians who see their lives and farms in danger.

<b>FULANI MILITIAS' ACTIONS ARE TERRORIST ACTS:            COMPILATION OF NEWS (2017 - 2020)            BASED ON 45 SOURCES (Author: José Luis Bazán, 2020)</b>							
	ATTACKS	KILLED	WOUNDED	KIDNAPPED	RAPED	HOMES	CHURCHES
<b>2020</b>	141	335	46+	137	2	176+	
<b>2019</b>	169	524	84	75	3	606	23
<b>2018</b>	245	1.478	230	29	7	300	1
<b>2017</b>	99	202	33+	12	4	6.500	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>654</b>	<b>2.539+</b>	<b>393+</b>	<b>253+</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7582+</b>	<b>24</b>

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The United Nations Special Rapporteur for Extrajudicial, Summary or Arbitrary Executions, Agnes Callamard, has labelled the Fulani violence as "*Nigeria's gravest security challenge*".<sup>1</sup> It has been reported that from 2017 until beginning of May 2020, there were 654 attacks against Christian farmers: Fulani extremist killed 2,539 individuals, wounded over 393, kidnapped more than 253 persons, and destroyed 7,582 homes and 24 churches.<sup>1</sup> The fact that Nigeria's President, Muhammadu Buhari is a Fulani, has raised suspicions and even accusations of failure to condemn and prosecute the systematic attacks by Fulani militias against the mostly Christians farming communities.



Number of IDPs registered in Nigeria (August 2021): 2.1 million

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The high incidence of violence, the flight from violence, the lack of shelter and risk of food insecurity in the Middle Belt is now considered by the UNHCR as a humanitarian crisis. According to the UN, in Benue State alone there are over 1 million IDPs.<sup>1</sup>

Thank you.

**END**