

HOW SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IS AFFECTING [REDACTED] AND OTHER CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA.

NOTE: The author of this article is a national leader within a particular network of churches in Nigeria. The network consists of over 4000 churches dispersed throughout the country, with over 500000 members. All references that might identify the sources for this information have been redacted.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Sectarian violence is a form of communal violence which is inspired by sectarianism,¹ that is between different sects of one particular mode of an ideology or religion within a nation/community. Religious segregation often plays a role in sectarian violence. In 2006, in answer to question from a reader as localized violence in Iraq was on the rise, a foreign editor at New York Times gave a good explanation of the difference: “Sectarian violence is conflict between and among groups with a specific ethnicity or religion. The conflict may have numerous, but the result is violence based on ethnic religious differences. Sectarian is caused by or feeling very strong support for the religious or political group that you are a member of in a way that can cause problems with other groups in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

How sectarian violence is affecting [REDACTED]

As will be shown, sectarian violence has led to the loss of uncountable lives and properties of members of [REDACTED]

¹ Sectarian violence - Wikipedia

The especially in Northern Nigeria which includes the middle belt region. Many have been kidnapped, killed and churches burnt.

The most internationally acclaimed incident was the kidnapping of over 300 school girls from Government Secondary School (G.S.S) Chibok in Chibok Local Government of Borno State in 2014.

A Mathematics and Christian religious studies teacher who is a minister [REDACTED] in Chibok by name [REDACTED] vividly the incident on phone. Many members of [REDACTED] were among the kidnapped girls. The father of one of the girls and a member of the [REDACTED] confirmed by phone that 7 years on, he is yet to be re-united with his daughter.

In the same period, Boko Haram terrorist group that completely seized this local government chased out members of our church fellowship (Similar to the experience of other Christian groups), three worship centers were burnt down. They are yet to be re-built they are:

- (a). [REDACTED] in chibok LGA of Borno State
- (b). [REDACTED] in chibok LGA of Borno State
- (c). [REDACTED] in chibok LGA of Borno State

In the Chibok, there were 11 churches with some having about 100 members but now many have been displaced and are refugee to other places like brother [REDACTED] whose daughter had been taken captive for seven years now, he is now residing at [REDACTED] Adamawa state.

Evangelism is almost non-existent as there is no freedom of either movement or of preaching. People are forced at the risk of their lives to either convert to Islam or be killed. The alternative is to vacate the area. Among those murdered in cold blood are preachers of the gospel like brother [REDACTED] who preached in Mubi. Wives were taken away from their

husbands and given to terrorist in forced marriages. These include young girls whose parent were driven away and forced into marriages even when they are underaged. Even the worship of the church is barely held. Brethren have to dress in Muslim attire while going for worship or be killed or kidnapped. It is only sundry service, that are held for about an hour as threat to live prevent mid-week services.

Personally, my residence was surrounded one day because I baptized a Muslim girl. This young lady of about 19 years was eventually forced into marriage to a Muslim man and her faith in Christ destroyed.

The overall effect is that the growth of [REDACTED] has greatly retarded as restriction on public preaching take its toll on evangelism. Pastors are not allowed into the compound of Moslems, as such one cannot preach from house to house. Brethren resort for sharing tracts and other religious literature by giving them to children met on the road or in school with hope they will read this to their family members.

HOW SECTARIAN VIOLENCE IS AFFECTING CHURCHES AND CHRISTIANS IN NIGERIA.

The spate at which this religious conflict or sectarian violence in Nigeria between the Muslims and Christian has polarized the country in such a way that has adversely affected churches and Christians is better imagine than real. This has generated serious concern due to Boko Haram mayhem on Christians in the North and Middle belt region in Nigeria. This anger has spawned sectarian violence. For instance, in 1986, in Ilorin Kwara State, militant Muslim attacked Christians on a palm Sunday procession leading to the destruction of churches. Similarly, in the same year, the statute of the Risen Christ Chapel of resurrection at the University of Ibadan was burnt by the Muslims. On the other hand, Gideon Akahwa

was beheaded in Kano in 1985 allegedly for desecrating a page of the Holy Quran. This has serious implication of the churches. Christian and national security. As Christians affected by this sectarian violence are displaced traumatized, revengeful, poor, depressed, killed, maimed, converted forcefully to Muslim Religions, exposed to several social ills, and hasty urge to migrate to other countries for safety. In the end, it is the Christians in Nigeria that suffers most.

Nigeria is currently plagued by Sectarian movements and groups.

Below is a table showing this occurrence².

Name	Date	Location	Deaths	Notes
2000 Kaduna Riots	2000-02-21-to 2000-05-23	Kaduna	2,000-5,000	Religious riots between Christian and Muslim over the introduction of shaira law in Kaduna state ,start of the religious riot phase of the Shaira conflict in Nigeria ,
2001 Jos Riot	200109-07 to 2001-09-17	Jos	500-5000	Religious riot between Christian and Muslims.
Yelwa Massacre	2004-02-to 2004-05	Yelwa, Shendam and Kano	c.975	Religious motivated killing between Christian and Muslim
Muhammad cartoons crisis	20006-02-18	Maiduguri	50+	The international crisis reached the Nigeria city of Maiduguri , in which over 50people were killed and many building destroyed or damaged by rioting Muslims, outrage because of cartoons about muhammed in the Danish newspaper jyllands posten.
2009 Boko Haram uprising	2009-07	Maiduguri ,Bauch,Pokiskum, Wudil	1,000	Islamic militants killed over a thousands people between 26 and 29 July ; during the violence, Christian were killed for refusing to convert to Islam
2010 Jos Riots	2010	Jos	992	Religious rioting ; victims were mostly Christian killed by Muslims

² ISAAC TERWASE SAMPSON." Religious violence in Nigeria: Casusal diagnoses and strategic recommendations to the state and religious communities", *African Journal on Conflict Resolution* (2012) p. 107-112

2011 Abuja united nation bombing	2011-08-26	Abuja	116	312 injured; Boko Haram attack a united nation office premises 25
2011 Damaturu attacks	2011 -11-04	s	100-150	Islamic Militant associated with Boko Haram police station , churches and banks
December 2011 northern Nigeria clashed	2011-12	Maiduguri and Damaturu	68	Islamic militants associated with Boko Haram Clashed With Security force between 22 and 23 December
December 2011 northern attack	2011-12-25	Madalla	41	73 injured ;Muslim militants bombed a catholic church during Christian Christmas mass
January 5-6 2012 Nigeria attack	2012-01-05-06	Mubi ,Yola, Gombi, And Maiduguri	37	Islamic terrorists attack churches and Christian business ; boko haram claimed responsibility
April 2012 kaduna bombing	2012-04-08	kaduna	38	Islamic terrorists bombed a church on Esther [31]
June 2012 kaduna church bombing	2016-06-07	Kaduna, wusasa, and sabon ,gari	12	80 injured ;Islamic terrorists bombed three churches
Deeper life church shooting	2012-08-07	Okene Kogi State	19	Islamic militants attack a church the pastor was among the dead
December 2012 shooting in northern Nigeria	2012-12-25	Abuja	27	Islamic militant attacked a church on Christmas day ; afterwards the church was set on fire
GWOZA MASSACRE	2014 -06-02	Gwoza ,Borno, Nigeria	200-300	Boko Haram attack on Christian villagers

Having acknowledged the fact of Muslim Christian conflicts, we now turn our attention to how this sectarian violence affect churches and Christian in Nigeria.

Insecurity: From the incessant sectarian violence in Nigeria, insecurity seems to have taken over our national life, hence hoodlums takes firm grip of the violence and by implication, forment trouble, civil unrests, take to armed robbery, arson, thurgery, and hooliganism thereby breaching the sacrosanct procedure of Christian worship at ██████████ in Nigeria. Rumour of attacks of Boko haram sect was wide spread in North East zone of Nigeria because of security challenge posed by the Boko Haram sect. Most painful and unfortunate incident is the educational level of the Boko haram stricken states which has dropped drastically due to incessant kidnapping of students, torture, rape and even murdered incidences. The case of LEAH SHARIBU kidnapped in 2014 from Chibok Government Girls Secondary school Borno State, is a horrible story to remember. Similarly, due to the activities of Boko haram sect, students promotion and graduation have been hampered to a very large extent. Many business outfits have closed down. Relaxation centers, hotels and tourist centre are all negatively affected due to boko haram insurgency³.

Suspicion: As a result of the religious tensions between the two dominant religious groups in Nigeria, there is a sustained culture of mutual suspicion and unhealthy rivalry between them. The provisions of section 38(1) and 10 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended) which have guaranteed freedom of religion and prohibits the declaration of state religion respectively, has done little to attenuate the frequency of religious conflicts, yet some state in Nigeria demonstrate patronage and

³ Olaide Aro, Boko Haram Insurgency in Nigeria: its Implication and way forwards toward avoidance of future insurgency. @<https://www.academia.edu/13559251/boko-haram-insurgency-in-nigeria-its-implication-and-way-forwards-toward-avoidance-of-future-insurgency>-accessed20/5/2021

eneration of this two dominant religious groups and has helped in heightening the underlying tensions and rivalry.

Spiritual Development of Christians is adversely affected due to frequent occurrence of sectarian violence. As Christian live in constant fear of attack. Consequently, many prospective converts have refuse to continue their believe in Christ do to fear of persecution from Bako Haram sects. Boko haram attacks on churches have made may Christians in the North – East of Nigeria to spurn Hebrews 10:25 which state the “ we Christians should not stay away from church meetings, as it’s the habit of others but that we should come together and encourage one another, do this even more as we see the day coming” The practice of many Christian in the core North and some part of middle belt is their preference to stay at home with their families for safety than to go to church when they know church is the targets of the insurgents⁴.

Trauma/Fear: Sectarian violence also has a way of instilling fear and depression into the hearts of worshippers. Especially in the core North and Middle Belt where sectarian violence is prevalent. As such, there is high decline of Christian worshippers currently. Boko haram activities have shattered many people’s lives. The number of widows, orphans and widowers has risen to a high rate. Many survivors of Boko haram are facing psychological trauma, homelessness and entrapped in refugee camps.

Dachal⁵ reported that the Christians leaders of the north – east of Nigeria noted that human tragedy and the emotional trauma created by the

⁴ Cook, D, ‘Boko Haram Escalates Attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria, Combating Terrorism Center’, accessed 20/5/2021 @<https://ctc.usma.edu/boko-haram-escalates-attacks-on-christians-in-northern-nigeria/>.

⁵ L A Dachal ‘Impact of Boko Haram on church and Society in Nigeria (2015) @grin.com/documents/388005.accessed 20/5/2021

insurgency is beyond human imagination as hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are completely cut off from their ancestral homes and relations are now taking refuge in Cameroons and the surrounding mountains. Aside, Boko haram call Christians infidels who are only good to be wasted by torture and gruesome death. This implies that peace is not guarantee in the enterprise of cohabiting with adherents of Islam⁶.

Politically:- The insurgency of Boko haram in Nigeria have posed serious security threat to Nigerians in the sense that people were been denied the choice of experiencing their natural freedom of movement due to fear of attack from members sates of Boko haram. Particularly in some parts of Northern Nigeria where Boko haram have taken over through planting of bombs as well as brutalized attack on innocent souls.

As a result, people from the Southern part of Nigeria are afraid to move to the northern part of Nigeria for fear of being killed by the insurgency. On the other land, people from the northern part are afraid to move to the southern part of Nigerian for fear of being molested and suspected as Boko haram terrorists. The wanton killings, and kidnapping by Boko haram and manifest brutalization of Christians, with impunity as viewed in the table above to a very large extent tend to label Nigeria as a failed state. In spite of the huge sum of money spent by Nigerian government on enforcement agency like:- Joint Task Force (JTF) Air force, Army, Navy, Mobile Police and Nigeria Security and Civil Defense Corps (NSCDC) to ensure lives and properties in Nigeria.

⁶ N.I.O & D.L.B. Boko Haram; Between Myth and Reality. N.P, n.d, page 31

Displacement: The upsurge of Muslim-Christian conflicts in Nigeria breed retrogression toward the effective political development and family unification. Many families had become disunited in their effort to run for safety. This displacement could not have been except for the havoc and sectarian violence from the Muslim Boko Haram group. More poignantly is the fact that many Christians who were displaced as a result of sectarian violence eventually had no option than to become refugees having migrated to other countries for safety due to fear of Boko Haram attacks on them.

Death; Sectarian violence in Nigeria have often left a bloody scenario with the loss of human and material resources. For instance, the maitatsine uprising in Kano between the 18th and 19 December, 1980 led to the death toll of 4,177 persons. On the other hand, these conflicts have witnessed massive looting, arson and the wanton destruction of property estimated at billions of Naira. A pointer to this case was the burning of 77 (seventy-seven) churches in the 1994 conflict in Tafawa Balewa local government area of Bauchi state.

Poverty: When Christians are attacked by Muslims and churches razed down by fire, valuable asset used in the building of church halls are equally damaged. Most often no compensation is paid. Aside this, means of livelihood of affected Christians are completely destroyed. Putting victims in the state of acute poverty, helplessness and loneliness. The psychological effect of this experiences leaves victims in perpetual fear, sick, suicidal feelings, bitter memories and pre-mature death⁷.

⁷ John Shiklam, How Boko Haram Activities Destroy Economy of the North.(This Day Newspaper@<https://www.thisdaylive.com/articles/how-boko-haram-activities-destroy-economy-of-the-north//122763> accessed 20/5/2021

A scholar found that amongst other things, Islam has multidimensional approaches to ensure that Nigeria becomes an Islamic State. Crimes committed in churches and against Christians in Nigeria has reach an alarming stage that calls for international intervention⁸. Instances abound of some grueling attacks and killings the 50 Christians deaths in March 2020 included the 13th and 14th March 2020 killings by the Jihadists herdsmen of seven Christian mourners in coordinated attacks in Guma L.G.A of Benue State. In 8 year between 2011-2019, Benue State alone has lost over 600 churches and other Christian worship centres to Fulani herdsmen. One of the big worries is that most church crimes go unreported. In fact there has been a steady influx of largely illiterate and regionally radicalized Boko Haram Northern Muslim Youths into communities and cities in the southeast and the south. As at December 2019, forests and bush lands of over 139 Igbo Communities, towns and hamlets have been invaded by violent Fulani herdsmen. Some rural communities in the Igbo region including Enugu State have already become unsafe 'no-go-areas'⁹

Apart from attacking Christian settlement in the middle Belt or North central some parts of the North West, jihadist herdsmen have also launched incessant attacks in the southeast and south – south leading to death of no fewer than 200 Christians since June 2015. The killings were mostly recorded in Enugu, Anambra, Delta and Edo states. Individual cases in Enugu State abound. Revered Father Clement Ugwu abducted

⁸ Ele, C., 2001, 'Islamic Triumphalisms: A Threat to Christian presence in Nigeria,' *Shepherd Magazine*, 1(2), August 19th, pp. 15. – 16.

⁹ Umeagbalasi, E 2020, 'Nigeria is a killing field of defenseless Christians', *Genocide Watch*, <https://www.genocidewatch.com/single-post/2020/04/13nigeria-is-a-killing-field-of-defenseless-christians> accessed 21/5/2021

and killed on 14th March 2019, in the same vein, Rev father Paul Ofu abducted and killed on 1st August, 2019. In September 2016, Rev. father Dim, Eze Okama and Chukwuemeka were abducted in Nsukka along Nkpologum – Nimbo road in Enugu State¹⁰.

It was reviewed that Fulani herdsmen in Enugu State attacked Ukpabi Nibo in Uzo – Uwani Local Government Area on 25th April 2016, killing over 40 people. Survivors fled to Neighbouring communities.

Hence, the Federal Government of Nigeria, confirming this disturbing situation in Nigeria through the minister for information Lai Muhammed stated that¹¹ the terrorists were deliberately deploying the antics of attacking Christians and churches in order to sow the seed of confusion between the two great religion they have started targeting christians and christian villages for a specific reason, which is to trigger a religious war and throw the nation into chaos.

Fulani extremist have upgraded their terror and extended the terror to South – Eastern and South – Western Nigeria¹² In 2018 a small village call Ukpo – mbelou in Benue state, a group of armed men stormed a Catholic Church around 05:30am and killed 17 worshippers who came for morning mass or devotion.¹³

Later, in February 2019, some Islamic herdsmen attacked a catholic parish in same Mbalam in Benue State and killed all worshippers in

¹⁰ Mamah, E., Ndujihe, C., Nkwopara, C. & Ozor, c., 2016, 'Bloodbath in Enugu as Fulani herdsmen kill 40,' Vanguard, viewed n.d., from <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2016/bloodbath-enugu-fulani-herdsmen-kill-40/> accessed 21/5/2021

¹¹ Daniel, S., 2020a, 'Boko Haram targeting Christians to trigger religious war-Mohammed,' Vanguard, viewed on 10 December 2020, from <https://www.vangaurdngr.com/2020/02/boko-haram-targeting-christains-to-trigger-religious-war-mohammed/>, accessed 21/5/2021

¹² Agbo, d.A Musa, H. & Zhema, S., 2020 'Insurgency, armed herdsmen and instability in Nigeria: a search for the way forward,' Global Journal of Arts. Humanities and social sciences 8(6), 63-81

¹³ Wantu, J., 2018, 'Suspected herdsmen kill two Catholic priests, 17 others', Guardian, viewed 03 December 2019, from <https://guardian.ng/news/suspected-herdsmen-kill-two-catholic-priests-17-others/>.

attendance for morning mass or devotion, claiming that members of the parish were responsible for converting hundreds of Muslims to Christianity.¹⁴

A lot of other church killing happened between 2018 and 2019 beside these two, both in Benue and Enugu state. Instances abound like the regular killing of Christians by Moslem locals in Jos.¹⁵

Finally, in September 2018, there was the tragic burning of a pastor, his wife and three sons in their church building by a Moslem group in plateau state.¹⁶

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Each of these cases, paints a summarized picture of common experiences in Nigerian churches and depicts attitude of government negligence to be oppressive, insensitive, discriminative and a major factor that causes attacks in churches. This is hinged on some lackadaisical disposition of government. For instance, after the killing of two catholic priest and 27 worshipers in a local catholic church in Benue state Nigeria, the Nigeria Senate summoned the president for questioning.¹⁷ the questioning did not, however, yield any measurable positive result for the security of churches in Nigeria. US president, Donald Trump, also called on Nigeria government to put an end to church attacks and killings in Nigeria

¹⁴ Chris, O., 2019, 'Herdsman Kill parishioners; seek death of businessman Victor Nwankwo,' <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2019/02/herdsmen-kill-parishioners-seek-death-of-businessman-victor-nwankwo/>.accessed 20/5/2021

¹⁵ Morning Star News, 2019, Local Muslims suspected in killing of Christians after Sunday worship in Jos, Nigeria, viewed 11 December 2020, from <https://www.christianheadlines.com/blog/local-muslims-suspected-in-killing-of-christians-after-sunday-worship-in-jos-nigeria.html>.accessed 20/5/2021

¹⁶ World Watch Monitor, 2018, Nigeria: Pastor and three sons burned alive among at least 20 killed in latest Plateau massacre, viewed 09 December 2020, from <https://www.worldwatchmonitor.org/2018/09/nigeria-pastor-and-three-sons-burned-alive-among-at-least-20-killed-in-lates-plaateau-massacre/>.

¹⁷ Henry, U. & Peter, D., 2018, 'Killings: Senate summons Buhari as herdsman attack another Benue church,' Vanguard, April, 23rd, p. 48.

(Egbegi et al); thousands of Christians have also protested¹⁸ but none of these efforts has resulted in any positive step by government to ensure more security of churches and bring those who perpetrate these killings of justice.

Furthermore, these Muslims sect, have an ideology that associates Christians and churches with the West, upon which, they react irrationally by maiming or killing Christians at will for not accepting Muslim religion. Some Christians were murdered for not dressing in Moslem attire. For instance, an incident of such occurred in 2015 when one Joshua Ada an Indigene of Kogi State serving as a missionary in Taraba State was killed by Boko Haram sect for not dressing like Moslem.

The effect of sectarian violence is enormous and very devastating. Hostilities against Christian by Muslims fanatics is in the rise that many Christians now think of having an outright warfare or reprisal attacks on the Muslims. All because many Muslims fanatics are fanning the flames of sectarian violence, marginalization and degrading treatment of Christians in Nigeria.

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¹⁸ Evelyn, O., 2018, 'Killings: Christians protest in Abua,' Premium times, viewed 27 June 2020, from <https://www.premiumtimesng.com/news/more-news/269355-killings-chrisrtans-protest-in-abuja.html>.accessed 20/5/2021