

Hundreds of Christians killed in Nigeria, churches destroyed

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NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA (BP)—At least 450 Christians have died in a series of attacks on Christian villages in three north central Nigerian states since May, according to reports from governmental and nongovernmental religious freedom advocates.

Christian death tolls include at least 300 in several attacks in Plateau state spanning May 15-17, according to reports from *Morning Star News* and [Christian Solidarity Worldwide](#); more than 100 in attacks spanning May and June in Benue state, *Morning Star* and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom reported; and 43 in Nasarawa state in mid-May, *Morning Star* reported.

Tens of thousands were displaced, according to *Morning Star* and CSW. Whole villages, dozens of church buildings and thousands of homes reportedly were destroyed. Grain was looted.



Morning Star quoted Christian leaders in blaming the attacks on militant Fulani herdsmen.

“As our people are fleeing, herders are occupying these areas and grazing freely on our farms,” *Morning Star* quoted a press statement signed by Samuel Door and Ephraim Zuai of the Shitile Development Association in Benue.

“Though due to the fear of general insecurity it is difficult to move from village to village to gather exact statistics, hordes of lives have been horrendously eliminated in several villages across the land, such that the whole land is thrown into wailing and mourning.”

‘Dire implications for religious freedom’

The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom referenced many of the attacks as ethno-nationalist in a [report it released June 9](#).

“Nigeria is home to a plethora of armed actors committing violence with dire implications for religious freedom. In several regions of the country assailants have targeted ethnoreligious minorities as well as houses of worship and religious ceremonies with violence,” the commission said in the report, ‘Ethno-nationalism and religious freedom in Nigeria,’ which referenced violence spanning June 2022 through May.

“In some areas, armed actors include ethno-nationalist militias seeking to wrest territorial control from government authority. Ethno-nationalist fighters in Nigeria have politicized religion and attacked civilians based on ethnoreligious identity,” the commission report stated.

“These fighters commit some of the most egregious atrocities and human rights violations of any actors in the country. This is particularly true in northcentral Nigeria, where ethno-nationalist fighters affiliated with the predominantly Muslim Fulani community attack vulnerable Christian civilians with impunity.”

But the predominantly Christian Igbo community in southeast Nigeria has also targeted Muslims, the commission report stated.

“Additionally in southeast Nigeria, ethno-nationalist fighters affiliated with

the predominantly Christian Igbo community have at times targeted Muslim civilians as a part of their campaign to secede” the commission report said.

“In both northern and southeast Nigeria, ethno-nationalist fighters have been implicated in attacks against both Muslim and Christian worshippers.”

Four pastors killed in recent attacks

In the latest attacks on Christian communities, at least four pastors were killed, according to several *Morning Star* reports.

On June 4, militant Fulani killed Mangmwo Tangshak Daniel of the Nigeria Baptist Convention in Kantoma village, and Shadrack Ayuba of the Assembly of God Nigeria church in Ntin Kombun village, both in Plateau, *Morning Star* said, attributing the report to Timothy Daluk, chairman of the Mangu Local Government Area Chapter of the Christian Association of Nigeria.

On May 8 in Benue, militants killed pastor Dominic Dajo of St. Peter Catholic Church in Hirnyam village, and his wife, *Morning Star* reported. On May 11 in Nasarawa, Fulani killed pastor Daniel Danbeki of the Evangelical Church Winning All in Takalafiya village, *Morning Star* said, along with his wife and 41 others in an attack spanning several hours.

Nigerians staged a peaceful protest May 25 in Jos, Plateau, as the attacks continued, CSW reported. The killings have included 130 deaths in 23 communities in the Mangu and Riyom Local Government Areas in Plateau, CSW said. The attacks displaced tens of thousands, destroyed thousands of homes and damaged farmlands and food barns.

CSW press officer Reuben Buhari called the attacks “a sad testament to

Nigeria's incapability to protect its own citizens."

The attacks follow the killings of [more than 200 in Christian areas in Benue and Kaduna](#) state in March and April following Nigeria's election season.

Kiri Kankhwende, CSW press and public affairs team leader, has called the long-term violence "deeply distressing" but "not at all uncommon" in the region.

"The unaddressed insecurity has now metastasized and constitutes a threat to Nigeria's territorial integrity, with serious implications for the region, the continent and the wider international community," Kankhwende said April 18.

In other reports from the region, 16 members of the Bege Baptist Church in the Chikun Local Government area of Kaduna, abducted in May, were [released June 4 after a ransom was paid](#), CSW reported June 6.

The 16 were among 40 abducted from the congregation May 7 by armed Fulani militants, CSW said, but many had managed to escape.

Despite the Fulani ethnicity of the assailants, Muslims contributed to the ransom that included a motorcycle, CSW reported.

"I confirm and give thanks that all 16 are now back home," CSW quoted John Joseph Hayab, Kaduna state chair of CAN. "We are grateful to the local Muslims who contributed towards the ransom, and pray that from now onwards the two religious communities will work together to bring this painful era of kidnapping, violence and killings to an end."

Fulani militants are among several violent extremist groups active in Nigeria, including Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province, Christian persecution watchdog Open Doors reported in 2023 in ranking Nigeria as the sixth most dangerous nation for Christians.