



**FACTSHEET: RELIGIOUS FREEDOM IN NIGERIA** Q2 2020

**Summary**

The situation in Nigeria during the second quarter of 2020 was greatly complicated by the continued COVID-19 pandemic. Many of the most violent areas stayed in near constant lockdown during this period, causing massive strain on the financial and physical welfare of the people. Fulani militants and Boko Haram were able to conduct many attacks against citizens who were following governmental orders by staying at home. These orders ultimately proved fatal for many innocent Christians who were attacked while locked in their own homes.

This quarter was even more violent and deadly than the first quarter of 2020. During the first quarter ICC tracked at least 766 casualties from 200 violent militant incidents. The second quarter, however, saw many more than this with 1,501 casualties from 291 violent militant incidents, claiming the lives of militants, government forces, and civilians.

**Methodology**

Each of the cases included in this report were verified by multiple sources, including the Armed Conflict Locator and Event Database and others. This methodology helps to eliminate false positives from the report, but also means that there are likely cases that are not included. Thus, the actual number of incidents may be somewhat higher than reported here.

**By the Numbers**

With at least 291 incidents of militant violence in the second quarter of 2020, Nigeria continues to see significant violence. The two main aggressors, Boko Haram and Fulani, are responsible for a total of 1,501 casualties and a significant number of injuries and abductions as well.

**Reported Casualties**

	Number of incidents	Total number killed	Militant casualties	Government casualties	Civilian casualties
Boko Haram	146	1026	692	106	228
Fulani	145	475	34	14	427

## Reported Injuries and Abductions

	Number of incidents	Government injuries	Civilians kidnapped	Civilians injured
Boko Haram	146	54	37	29
Fulani	145	0	65	48

## Main Locations of Attacks

	Number of attacks	Number killed
Borno State (Boko Haram)	130	878
Benue State (Fulani Militants)	22	73
Kaduna State (Fulani Militants)	20	69
Plateau State (Fulani Militants)	16	51

## Boko Haram: A Continued Pattern of Aggression

Boko Haram continues to be the main focus of the Buhari government. The Nigerian military continues to fight the terrorist organization and has seen some success in the past few months. The reported number of deaths of Boko Haram militants increased significantly this quarter, due to how much the Nigerian government has been pushing the fight there. Although this represents progress, it does not mean that the group has been defeated.

President Buhari released a statement in June, saying that control of all local governmental areas had been taken back from the terrorists long ago. This statement was meant to communicate that his military was in control of all of Nigeria, including Borno State. However, there have been numerous large scale attacks by Boko Haram against both civilian and military targets throughout Borno State. This shows that the Nigerian military still has little control over the movements and operations of the group in at least that state.

It is unlikely that Nigeria will be able to completely rid itself of Boko Haram for many years unless they are able to deal with the issue of Islamic extremism that has been spreading throughout the northern part of their country and much of West Africa.

## Fulani Militants: Government Passivity Enables Militant Impunity

During the second quarter of 2020, Fulani militants are believed to have instigated at least 180 attacks on Christians and their villages throughout the Middle Belt of Nigeria. Many of these attacks took place against defenseless and peaceful communities who had not committed any crimes. Despite this, the Nigerian government under the leadership of President Buhari continues to claim that these attacks are conducted by both sides.

In the case of the 20 attacks that took place in the Kajuru area of Kaduna State, President Buhari express his condemnation of the attacks, saying that reprisals for past violence were wrong. By saying this, the president was claiming that the Fulani militants that conducted the attack had been previously attacked by the Adara people of Kajuru. However, this statement was not supported by any evidence and placed the blame for the deaths at the feet of those who had been killed.

Additionally, the rise of attacks in Benue state again has caused great concern. Many hoped that the institution of the Anti-Open Grazing Bill in November 2017 would help bring peace to the area by stopping herders and farmers from clashing over land. For nearly a year and a half this act seemed to be working; the number of violent incidents decreased significantly from where they were in late 2017. However, this past quarter saw a complete resurgence in the violence.

Because the Benue government has banned the use of open pastures by cattle herders, these attacks in Benue can no longer be about land. This means that there is another reason that the Fulani conducted these attacks.

## **Policy Recommendations**

The United States must consider the broader impact that the escalating situation in Nigeria could have on the larger West African region and across sub-Saharan Africa. The U.S. diplomatic mission to Nigeria has great potential to engage in meaningful efforts to reduce not only the current violence in Nigeria but also possible future violence in the greater region. The serious issue of growing and ongoing Fulani militant violence must be raised by the U.S. to the Nigerian government.

The U.S. should appoint a special envoy to Nigeria in order to more effectively track and report on the escalating violence taking place in Nigeria. This envoy should have extensive understanding of military operations, paramilitary tactics, and terrorism in order to effectively advise the Nigerian government regarding the mitigation of the escalating destabilization in Nigeria and the surrounding region.

The U.S. should also conduct a comprehensive analysis of U.S. aid distribution in the region to ensure maximum effectiveness of aid disbursement. The U.S. should consider restructuring its aid to channel resources to organizations with a vested interest in the region as a whole rather than giving aid to the Nigerian government which directs almost 100% of U.S. aid to the northeast of Nigeria. This issue should be addressed and a more even distribution of aid throughout Nigeria should be pursued.

The U.S. needs to understand and broadcast the true nature of the violence in Nigeria. When investigating the situation in Nigeria, the U.S. government needs to ensure that all regions of the country are studied in order to dispel any misleading narratives. A comprehensive study of the violence committed by both Boko Haram and Fulani militants must be conducted. A bipartisan Congressional study on the issue would help to further this goal and inform the U.S. response to the situation in Nigeria, as would the establishment of a special commission to track the situation in an ongoing manner