



Crisis in the Middle Belt: Religious Persecution and Security Failure in Nigeria

A SECURITY AND POLICY ASSESSMENT

*Why U.S., U.N., and Nigerian Security Policy Must Confront the
Fulani Ethnic Militia and Protect Vulnerable Christian Communities*

4,216+

*Christians
Killed (2026)*

16.8

*Avg.
Deaths/Day*

600+

*Communities
Destroyed*

5 million+

*Christians
Displaced*

SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

Prepared by **Equipping the Persecuted**, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit offering humanitarian aid and support to persecuted Christian communities. Equipping the Persecuted (Persecuted.com) delivers critical alerts, news, and tracking through TruthNigeria.com, the Truth Nigeria App, and Nigeria Terror Tracker (NTTMap.org).

SECTIONS: **I) Executive Summary** **II) Data & Findings** **III) Policy Recommendations**

I) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nigeria's Middle Belt is the epicenter of a religious persecution and security crisis that is too often described in language that obscures conditions on the ground. Armed groups raid predominantly Christian farming communities, kill and abduct residents, burn homes and churches, destroy food stores, and drive survivors from their ancestral lands.

TruthNigeria's field reporting identifies the most acute danger in Benue, Plateau, and Southern Kaduna, with significant pressure also reported in Taraba, Nasarawa, Niger, and Kwara. During a single week in September, TruthNigeria documented at least 35 deaths and more than 70 abductions across multiple states, while warning of potential coordinated attacks on churches, schools, and youth service camps. [1]

Violence in Nigeria is driven by multiple armed groups, including Fulani ethnic militant networks, and traditional terrorist organizations (i.e. Boko Haram, ISWAP, Ansaru, and Lakurawa). Together, these actors perpetrate killings, abductions, displacement, extortion, and attacks on civilian communities across the country.

Kidnapping victims in Nigeria often endure torture, starvation, and brutal treatment while in captivity. Women and girls face an additional risk of sexual violence. Boys and young men are not typically taken to serve as child soldiers, but they are frequently beaten, tortured, forced into labor, or held for ransom under harsh conditions. Kidnappers use videos of hostages to pressure families into paying ransoms, forcing many households to sell everything they own, leaving families destitute, and some ultimately end up in Internally Displaced Person (IDP) camps.

The stakes are not abstract. Equipping The Persecuted (ETP) recorded 4,216 Christian deaths in Nigeria between January 1 and September 8, 2026. This represents an average of 16.8 deaths per day, or approximately one death every 86 minutes. On September 10, TruthNigeria documented the killing of eight Christians in Ayilamo, Benue State. Because those deaths had not yet been incorporated into the master casualty registry by the reporting cutoff date, this report retains 4,216 as the auditable minimum. The actual total is therefore higher. [2]

Kidnapping data in Nigeria is neither comprehensive nor fully reliable. Although reported kidnappings are often highest among attacks carried out by groups such as Boko Haram, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), and Lakurawa, these incidents are more likely to be documented by government authorities and security services. In contrast, kidnappings linked to Fulani militant activity in parts of the Middle Belt, particularly Plateau, Southern Kaduna, and Benue, are often believed to be underreported. Fear of retaliation, limited access to authorities, and mistrust of government institutions frequently discourage families from reporting incidents. While jihadist groups frequently target Muslim as well as Christian communities, many of the underreported kidnappings in the Middle Belt disproportionately affect Christian populations.

The dominant public narrative also obscures the primary perpetrator trend. Nigeria Terror Tracker (NTT) data show that Fulani-linked actors accounted for 4,932 recorded fatalities between January 1 and September 7, 2025, and 786 fatalities during the same period in 2026. Boko Haram and ISWAP, by contrast, were responsible for a combined 1,958 fatalities in 2025 and 189 in 2026. Accordingly, Fulani-linked actors caused 2.5 times more recorded deaths than Boko Haram and ISWAP combined in 2025 and 4.2 times more in 2026 within NTT's verified incident series. [3]

The Fulani are one of the world's largest nomadic pastoral communities. Since the jihad movements of the early 1800s, some militant factions associated with Fulani-led Islamist movements have sought to expand political and religious control in parts of Nigeria. The Fulani influence expanded significantly during President Buhari's administration, aided by policies that were favorable to cross-border movement from neighboring countries. Attacks against Christians began to increase dramatically during Buhari's term, which allowed Fulani politicians and military personnel to take control of Nigeria's security apparatus. Meanwhile, the traditional terrorists like ISWAP broke off from Boko Haram and are directly connected to ISIS. Lakurawa are a hybrid jihadist terrorist group primarily operating in northwestern Nigeria and collaborating with Islamic State Sahel Province (ISSP) across Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.

This report acknowledges that tribal, land-use, grazing, and communal disputes exist throughout Nigeria and can result in serious violence. However, these factors alone do not account for the prevailing pattern documented herein, which is characterized by village raids, church burnings, targeted killings, abductions, the destruction of communities, and the long-term displacement of Christian farming populations from ancestral lands.

Local disputes over land, resources, or communal identity can be deadly, but they are not equivalent to the systematic destruction or depopulation of entire villages. According to Equipping The Persecuted and TruthNigeria field reporting, *the destruction of villages, burning of churches, and permanent displacement of communities are overwhelmingly associated with religiously motivated attacks and sustained militant territorial pressure* rather than isolated communal disputes. The crisis must therefore be described accurately: while insecurity in Nigeria affects multiple communities, the majority of documented violence against Christian farming communities examined in this report appears to be religiously motivated and carried out through organized militant networks.

This distinction matters because inaccurate characterization can produce flawed policy responses. When attacks are framed only as farmer-herder clashes, the actions of unknown gunmen, or generalized rural violence, mass persecution may be misinterpreted as merely a development problem or a policing failure. Likewise, when the religious identity of affected communities is omitted, the religious dimension of the violence may be underrepresented in public reporting and casualty records. As a result, targeted persecution can be absorbed into broader narratives of insecurity, obscuring both its nature and its scale. [10]

Independent religious-freedom authorities have likewise elevated concern over the crisis. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent bipartisan U.S. government advisory body, recommended Nigeria for Country of Particular Concern designation in its 2026 Annual Report. A subsequent May 2026 USCIRF issue update identified violence by non-state Fulani militant actors as a significant religious-freedom concern, noting attacks that

have driven communities from their ancestral lands and into precarious displacement across the Middle Belt. [8] [9]

Nigeria needs a security and justice framework that holds territory after attacks, enables the safe and voluntary return of displaced Christians, restores homes and livelihoods, prosecutes terrorists and their supporters, investigates credible allegations of official complicity, and provides lawful, trained, and accountable community defense mechanisms. Humanitarian relief alone is insufficient; without return and recovery, temporary displacement can become permanent dispossession.

II) DATA AND FINDINGS

The data and findings presented in this section are based on years of independent field reporting, including eyewitness interviews, survivor testimony, local church and community records, whistleblower disclosures from credible sources, and on-the-ground verification conducted by Equipping The Persecuted (ETP), TruthNigeria, and trusted local partners. Unless otherwise noted, all figures should be understood as documented minimums and are likely to understate the full scale of the violence and displacement.

I. Principal Findings

- a. **Christian Death Toll:** The Equipping The Persecuted (ETP) master registry documents at least 4,216 Christian deaths in Nigeria between January 1 and September 8, 2026. Subsequent attacks recorded in September indicate that the actual total is higher. [2]
- b. **Ground Verification:** TruthNigeria's casualty figures are derived from eyewitness testimony and information collected by field personnel and trusted local networks, then independently reviewed and verified before inclusion in the casualty registry. [2]
- c. **Early-Warning System:** Since June 2023, TruthNigeria.com has published at least 163 alerts and real-time warning notices, including 50 during 2026 through September 14. The broader Equipping The Persecuted and TruthNigeria network has issued more than 200 operational terror alerts with a documented accuracy rate of 93 percent. [2] [7]
- d. **Perpetrator Pattern:** Nigeria Terror Tracker (NTT) data indicate that Fulani-linked actors were responsible for more deaths in verified incidents involving Christian victims than Boko Haram and the ISWAP combined during the comparable 2025 and 2026 reporting periods. [3]
- e. **Human Toll:** Equipping The Persecuted estimates that violence and insecurity have displaced more than five million Christians and led to the destruction or abandonment of more than 600 Christian communities. [2]
- f. **Policy Priority:** Effective policy should prioritize the safe return of displaced populations, the restoration of property and livelihoods, accountability and justice for victims, disruption of militant networks, prosecution of material supporters, and the development of lawful, trained, and accountable state and local protection capacity.

2. Christian Death Toll and Internal Year Comparison

The figure of 4,216 Christian deaths represents Equipping The Persecuted's (ETP) consolidated casualty count for the period January 1 through September 8, 2026. It is a documented minimum derived from ETP and TruthNigeria field reporting, eyewitness and survivor testimony, local contacts, and subsequent verification. Casualty figures are not increased until new names, incidents, and supporting evidence have been reconciled against the master registry. Accordingly, the eight Christians reported killed in Ayilamo, Benue State, on September 10 are referenced separately rather than incorporated into the audited total. [2]

For year-to-year comparisons, this report relies on data from the Nigeria Terror Tracker (NTT). NTT maintains a verified incident database that allows consistent filtering by date, location, and perpetrator across reporting periods. Its fatality dataset serves a different analytical purpose from ETP's Christian-death master registry and should therefore be treated as a separate source. The two datasets employ different methodologies and should not be combined or interpreted as interchangeable measures of violence. [3]

Period	All NTT Fatalities	Fulani-linked	Boko Haram + ISWAP	Fulani Multiplier
Jan 1 to Sep 7, 2025	8,988	4,932	1,958	2.52 times
Jan 1 to Sep 7, 2026	1,313	786	189	4.16 times

The 2025 combined total comprises 631 fatalities attributed to Boko Haram and 1,327 attributed to ISWAP. The corresponding 2026 total comprises 148 Boko Haram-related fatalities and 41 attributed to ISWAP. The 2026 Boko Haram figure includes 143 incidents classified as "Boko Haram" and five classified as "Boko Haram terrorists" within the Nigeria Terror Tracker dataset. Across both comparable reporting periods, Fulani-linked actors accounted for 5,718 recorded fatalities, compared with 2,147 fatalities attributed to Boko Haram and ISWAP combined, yielding a ratio of approximately 2.66 to 1. [3]

While Muslims are also among the victims, the majority are non-Fulani Muslims. This distinction is important because it suggests that the violence is religiously motivated and includes an ideological and ethnic militant strategy directed against multiple communities.

3. Fulani-Linked Actors Exceed Boko Haram and ISWAP Combined

The Nigeria Terror Tracker (NTT) comparison supports a clear conclusion: within the tracker's verified incident series, Fulani-linked militant actors were responsible for more Christian deaths than Boko Haram and ISWAP combined. This finding holds for each reporting period examined and does not depend on fatalities attributed to unidentified actors or on the separate findings of the Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa (ORFA). [3]

The findings are independently reinforced by ORFA's longer-term analysis. Covering the period from October 2019 through September 2025, ORFA documented 22,835 confirmed Christian civilian deaths and attributed approximately 53 percent of those killings to Fulani militant groups, compared with approximately 8 percent attributed to Boko Haram and ISWAP combined. ORFA

further reported 79,323 fatalities resulting from terrorism-related violence in Nigeria between 2020 and 2025, including 42,033 civilian deaths. [6]

ORFA's methodology is publicly documented and suitable for citation. According to its killings and abductions fact sheets, the organization's findings draw primarily on field data collected through local research partners and secondary data from the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED). ORFA further notes that many media, government, and conflict-monitoring sources do not routinely record the religious affiliation of victims. Where religious identity could not be established through available evidence, cases were classified as "unknown" rather than assigned to a religious category. [6]

Notably, ORFA's findings also indicate that victims include both Christians and non-Fulani Muslims. This distinction is significant because it suggests that the violence cannot be explained solely as a Christian-Muslim conflict. Rather, the pattern is consistent with a broader ideological, territorial, and communal strategy directed against multiple populations perceived to be outside the militants' sphere of influence or control. [6]

4. Current Middle Belt Threat Assessment

The threat environment in Nigeria's Middle Belt is characterized by a combination of village raids, abductions, intimidation, land occupation, and limited accountability for perpetrators. In Benue, Plateau, Southern Kaduna, Nasarawa, and Taraba, armed Fulani militant networks are identified as the principal named threat in TruthNigeria and Nigeria Terror Tracker reporting. Throughout this report, the terms Fulani-linked actors and Fulani Ethnic Militia refer specifically to armed groups and organized militant networks identified through incident-level evidence. These terms do not imply collective responsibility on the part of Fulani civilians or the Fulani population as a whole.

TruthNigeria's investigation of the September 10 attack in Ayilamo, Benue State, illustrates the prevailing pattern. According to eyewitness accounts and local community officials, more than 200 armed Fulani Ethnic Militia members entered the area, killing eight Christian residents and four police officers before withdrawing following security intervention. Separately, TruthNigeria issued a security alert reporting the movement of armed fighters through Kaduna toward Plateau State and warning of suspected ISWAP reconnaissance activity targeting churches, schools, and National Youth Service Corps facilities. [4] [5]

While Christians have borne the brunt of many attacks in the Middle Belt, Muslims have also been among the victims. Notably, however, many of the Muslim victims are non-Fulani Muslims. This distinction is significant because it suggests that the violence cannot be understood solely through a Christian-Muslim lens. Rather, the pattern is consistent with a broader strategy of militant expansion, territorial control, and ideological coercion directed against multiple communities outside the militants' sphere of influence.

Area	Risk	Observed Pattern	Immediate Priority
Benue	CRITICAL	Mass village attacks, arson, cross-border movement, prolonged displacement	Hold cleared territory, protect returns, secure farms and roads
Plateau	CRITICAL	Coordinated rural raids and reported armed movement toward the Jos hinterland	Protect Bassa, Barkin Ladi, Bokkos, Mangu, and Riyom corridors
Southern Kaduna	CRITICAL	Kidnapping networks, village raids, forest camps, and movement corridors	Disrupt camps, protect villages, and control forest access routes
Taraba	HIGH	Cross-border staging and pressure on Christian farming communities	Joint Benue-Taraba operations and permanent rural posts
Nasarawa	HIGH	Staging, logistics, and spillover risk into Benue and the FCT approaches	Financial investigations, route surveillance, and arrests
Niger and Kwara	HIGH	Expansion by jihadist and bandit networks, mass abduction, and weak rural coverage	Forward bases, road security, and coordinated state police planning

5. Media Framing, Undercounting, and Mischaracterization

A recurring challenge in documenting violence in Nigeria is that both perpetrators and victims are frequently reported without reference to religious identity. As a result, attacks that may have a religiously targeted component can be recorded and interpreted as generic incidents of rural insecurity. For example, media coverage often describes attacks in terms of "armed men," "gunmen," or "villagers" without identifying the religious identity of affected communities. Such framing can obscure patterns of victimization that may be relevant to understanding the nature and drivers of the violence. [10]

This issue has significant implications for both public understanding and policy analysis. Datasets that rely heavily on media reports inevitably inherit the limitations and omissions present in those sources. ORFA has specifically noted that many conflict-monitoring systems, media accounts, and official reports do not routinely record the religious affiliation of victims. Consequently, ORFA conducts supplementary research to determine religious identity where evidence permits, while classifying cases as "unknown" when such identification cannot be established with confidence. [6]

The result is that casualty statistics and conflict analyses may underrepresent the religious dimension of violence in affected regions. Accurate assessment therefore requires not only counting incidents and fatalities, but also examining patterns of victimization, community targeting, displacement, and the destruction of religious institutions where those factors are relevant to understanding the character of the conflict. [6] [10]

6. Tribal Violence and Communal Conflict

Nigeria experiences genuine tribal, land-use, grazing, and other communal disputes, and this report does not characterize every local conflict as religious persecution. However, such disputes account for only part of the pattern documented herein and do not adequately explain the prevailing security conditions facing many Christian farming communities across the Middle Belt.

The distinguishing characteristic of the violence examined in this report is the destruction of communities followed by displacement and the loss of access to ancestral lands. While communal disputes may result in localized clashes, they do not ordinarily produce the systematic burning of

churches, the targeted killing or abduction of worshippers and clergy, the abandonment of entire villages, or the prolonged denial of return to displaced populations. Equipping The Persecuted estimates that more than five million Christians have been displaced and that more than 600 Christian communities have been destroyed or emptied as a result of violence and insecurity. [2]

The most reliable quantitative measure presented in this report is the perpetrator comparison derived from the Nigeria Terror Tracker's verified incident series. Within the comparable 2025 and 2026 reporting periods, Fulani-linked actors accounted for substantially more fatalities than Boko Haram and ISWAP combined. [2] This finding is independently reinforced by ORFA, which attributes approximately 53 percent of documented Christian civilian killings to Fulani militant groups, compared with approximately 8 percent attributed to Boko Haram and ISWAP combined. [6]

7. Displacement, Dispossession, and Accountability

Displacement alters the security and demographic realities of affected regions. When displaced families remain in camps or temporary settlements while armed actors retain access to farms, transportation routes, water sources, and villages, displacement can evolve from a humanitarian emergency into a mechanism of long-term territorial change. Humanitarian assistance remains essential, but relief efforts that are not accompanied by safe and voluntary return may unintentionally contribute to the normalization of dispossession. [2]

A recurring challenge is the persistence of impunity. In many affected areas, attackers have demonstrated the ability to operate across local and state boundaries, conduct repeated attacks, and return to previously targeted communities. Effective accountability therefore requires investigations that extend beyond individual perpetrators to encompass the broader support structure behind attacks, including commanders, recruiters, weapons suppliers, transport facilitators, financiers, intelligence providers, and any public officials found to have aided, protected, or facilitated criminal activity.

A sustainable response requires more than emergency relief. It demands security measures that protect vulnerable communities, credible investigations, prosecution of perpetrators and their supporters, restoration of property and livelihoods, and the creation of conditions that enable displaced persons to return voluntarily, safely, and with dignity. Without such measures, cycles of violence, displacement, and dispossession are likely to persist.

III) POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Pressure and support the Nigerian government to ensure accountability and justice for terrorist violence through strengthened law enforcement, judicial action, and security sector capacity. If the government proves unwilling or unable to effectively protect civilians and dismantle terrorist networks, the international community should consider coordinated assistance measures, including enhanced security cooperation and, where legally authorized and necessary, international intervention to prevent further atrocities.

At the same time, support a sustained, intelligence-driven campaign to identify, disrupt, and dismantle Fulani militant networks operating in Nigeria's Middle Belt, alongside continued operations against Boko Haram, ISWAP, ISSP, Lakurawa, bandit networks, and other armed groups. This effort should map and target leadership structures, weapons supply chains, financing mechanisms, transport routes, safe havens, recruitment systems, communications networks, and cross-state movement corridors. All security operations should clearly distinguish organized militant actors from Fulani civilians as an ethnic community, ensuring that counterterrorism measures focus on perpetrators of violence while protecting innocent populations and upholding human rights.

1. Neutralize organized militant networks

Priority should be given to a sustained, intelligence-driven campaign to identify, disrupt, and dismantle Fulani militant networks in the Middle Belt, alongside continued operations against Boko Haram, ISWAP, ISSP, Lakurawa, bandit groups, and other armed actors. The campaign should target leadership, financing, weapons supply, recruitment, communications, transport routes, and safe havens while distinguishing militant networks from Fulani civilians. Nigeria should be supported and pressed to investigate, prosecute, and hold accountable those responsible for violence. Where domestic efforts prove inadequate, international partners should consider additional measures to support civilian protection, accountability, and regional security.

2. Support the Return and Resettlement of Displaced Christian Communities

The United States, the Government of Nigeria, and international partners should prioritize the voluntary, safe, dignified, and sustainable return of displaced Christian communities to their ancestral lands. Return initiatives should be linked to long-term security measures that prevent renewed displacement and ensure that affected populations can rebuild their lives in safety.

- **Successful return requires more than humanitarian assistance.** Security forces should secure and hold affected areas, maintain a continuing presence in vulnerable communities, protect transportation routes, farms, markets, and places of worship, and prevent the reemergence of armed actors. Return should occur only where territory has been cleared, stabilized, and placed under effective civilian protection.
- **Authorities should also establish transparent mechanisms** for the restoration of property rights and customary land tenure. This should include documenting ownership claims, adjudicating disputes through lawful and impartial procedures, removing unlawful

occupiers where appropriate, and preventing the permanent transfer or redesignation of land belonging to displaced communities while their members remain unable to return.

- **Long-term recovery** will require the reconstruction of homes, churches, schools, clinics, roads, wells, and agricultural infrastructure, together with access to trauma care, livelihood restoration, and community rehabilitation programs. Particular attention should be given to restoring agricultural production and economic self-sufficiency so that displaced families are not forced into prolonged dependence on humanitarian assistance.
- **To ensure accountability and transparency**, Nigerian authorities should publicly track return and recovery efforts through measurable indicators, including the number of displaced households, communities restored, families voluntarily returned, essential services rebuilt, funds disbursed, property claims resolved, and security conditions in return areas.

Humanitarian relief remains essential, but relief alone is insufficient. Without secure return, property restoration, and effective protection, temporary displacement risks becoming permanent dispossession.

3. Expand U.S. Investigative and Intelligence Focus

U.S. intelligence, counterterrorism, and law-enforcement agencies should broaden their analytical focus beyond Boko Haram and ISWAP to include a comprehensive assessment of Fulani militant networks and other violent actors operating in the Middle Belt. Such efforts should examine leadership structures, financing mechanisms, weapons acquisition, recruitment pipelines, communications systems, logistical support networks, cross-border links, and relationships with other armed organizations.

An exclusive focus on ISIS-affiliated groups risks overlooking other militant networks responsible for significant levels of violence. Intelligence collection and analysis should therefore be guided by threat patterns and operational realities rather than organizational labels alone. Assistance focused only on ISIS-linked organizations will miss the principal actor pattern documented by TruthNigeria and Nigeria Terror Tracker. [3]

4. Ensure Government Accountability at Every Level

Independent investigations should be initiated wherever credible evidence suggests that elected officials, security personnel, local authorities, traditional leaders, or other state-linked actors have materially assisted militant groups, failed to act despite credible warnings, obstructed investigations, or otherwise facilitated impunity. Such inquiries should be conducted as a matter of due diligence and accountability and should not be interpreted as a presumption of guilt against any individual.

- **Create a Middle Belt Atrocities Prosecution Unit**
Nigeria's Attorney General should establish a specialized prosecution and investigative unit

focused on serious crimes in Benue, Plateau, Southern Kaduna, Taraba, and Nasarawa. The unit should include dedicated investigators, prosecutors, forensic specialists, financial analysts, and witness-protection personnel.

- **Investigate Entire Criminal Networks**

Investigations should target not only direct perpetrators but also commanders, financiers, recruiters, weapons suppliers, transport facilitators, ransom collectors, intelligence sources, and any officials who knowingly enable criminal activity.

- **Protect Evidence and Witnesses**

Authorities should standardize crime-scene preservation, geospatial documentation, witness interviews, weapons tracing, digital evidence retention, and chain-of-custody procedures.

- **Publish Accountability Metrics**

The federal government should release regular public reports detailing investigations initiated, suspects arrested, charges filed, assets seized or frozen, prosecutions completed, convictions obtained, and unresolved cases.

5. Disrupt Terror Financing, Logistics, and Material Support

Nigeria should establish joint financial-investigation task forces linking prosecutors, law-enforcement agencies, intelligence services, customs authorities, military investigators, and financial regulators. These units should trace financial flows related to ransom payments, weapons procurement, livestock and commodity transactions, informal cash networks, and other sources of militant financing.

The United States, allied governments, and international partners should coordinate targeted financial sanctions, travel restrictions, and asset freezes against verified terrorist financiers, weapons traffickers, militant leaders, and any individuals who materially assist violent activities or obstruct accountability efforts.

6. Strengthen Lawful and Accountable Community Protection

Nigeria should expand lawful and accountable mechanisms for local security, including reforms that improve state-level policing capacity and carefully regulated community protection initiatives. Communities facing repeated attacks require effective security arrangements that are responsive, lawful, and subject to oversight.

Any locally based protection framework should include rigorous vetting, professional training, clear command structures, weapons accountability procedures, independent oversight, complaints mechanisms, and safeguards against political exploitation or human-rights abuses.

7. Connect Early Warning to Rapid Protective Action

Nigeria should establish integrated early-warning and response systems that combine intelligence from military and police services with verified reports from local authorities, religious leaders, humanitarian organizations, community networks, and independent monitoring organizations (i.e. Nigeria Terror Tracker and TruthNigeria). Every credible warning should be assigned a tracking number, responsible commander, documented response decision, and post-incident review. [3] [7]

- **Establish Response Standards**
High-confidence warnings should trigger immediate acknowledgment, escalation through relevant command structures, and documented protective actions.
- **Pre-Position Protection During High-Risk Periods**
Security resources should be increased during predictable periods of elevated risk, including planting and harvest seasons, school reopenings, religious holidays, elections, funerals, and major community gatherings.
- **Improve Cross-State Coordination**
Joint operational planning should focus on high-risk corridors, including movements between Benue, Taraba, Plateau, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Niger, and Kwara states. Security agencies should maintain interoperable communications systems and coordinated response authorities.

8. Condition Security Assistance on Civilian Protection Outcomes

International security assistance should be linked to measurable improvements in civilian protection. Training, equipment transfers, intelligence support, and financial assistance should include requirements for transparent investigations, end-use monitoring, accountability mechanisms, and demonstrated compliance with human-rights standards.

Performance benchmarks should include reductions in killings and abductions, improved response times, successful prosecutions, increased community returns, weapons recoveries, and disruption of militant financing networks.

9. Improve Casualty Documentation and Religious-Identity Tracking

The United States, Nigeria, and international human-rights organizations should support independent casualty-documentation initiatives that record religious identity when relevant and verifiable.

Reporting systems should distinguish among:

- Confirmed religious identity;
- Unknown religious identity;
- Alleged religiously motivated incidents pending verification.

Improved documentation would reduce misclassification and improve understanding of violence affecting vulnerable communities while preserving methodological transparency and evidentiary standards.

10. Strengthen Election Integrity, Transparency, and Accountability

Amid continuing concerns regarding election administration and public trust, Nigeria and its international partners should prioritize measures that improve electoral transparency, accountability, and citizen confidence. Election integrity is not merely a democratic concern; it is also a security and human-rights issue because political legitimacy directly affects public trust in state institutions responsible for protecting vulnerable populations.

International organizations, including the United Nations, African Union, European Union, Commonwealth, and other qualified election-monitoring bodies, should be invited to provide election observation, technical assistance, and independent verification of electoral processes.

Additional measures should include:

- Deployment of expanded domestic and international election-observation missions;
- Public release of polling-unit results in machine-readable formats;
- Independent audits of voter-registration systems and election technology;
- Enhanced transparency regarding vote tabulation and transmission;
- Stronger protections for journalists, observers, and civil-society organizations;
- Investigations into credible allegations of electoral misconduct; and
- Public reporting on election-related complaints and resolutions.

Ensuring that citizens can freely choose their leaders through credible elections is critical to strengthening governance, accountability, and long-term security.

11. Maintain International Religious-Freedom Engagement

The United States and partner governments should continue monitoring Nigeria's religious-freedom conditions and evaluate progress through measurable indicators, including civilian protection, prosecution of perpetrators, safe return of displaced populations, accountability for attacks, and the rescue or release of abducted individuals. United States should retain Nigeria's Country of Particular Concern designation until measurable benchmarks are met

International engagement should recognize that the protection of vulnerable communities in the Middle Belt is simultaneously a security, human-rights, displacement, governance, and religious-freedom concern. Sustained diplomatic attention and accountability mechanisms should remain in place until durable improvements are achieved. [8] [9]

IMPLEMENTATION BENCHMARKS

Period	Federal Action	State and Local Action	Public Measure
First 30 days	Name a national coordinator; open prosecution and financing cells; publish priority cases	Map threatened and occupied communities; assign commanders to active alerts	Case numbers, commanders, and alert actions published
Days 31 to 90	Issue warrants where thresholds are met; freeze linked assets; deploy return security units	Stand up vetted protection units and permanent rural posts	Arrests, asset freezes, response times, and protected communities
Months 3 to 6	Begin priority trials; complete state-police ratification process; fund return authority	Start voluntary returns and reconstruction in certified areas	Trials underway, households returned, services restored
Months 6 to 12	Audit prosecutions, security aid, and return spending; expand successful operations	Complete armory, training, complaints, and oversight systems	Killings, abductions, displacement, convictions, and recidivism trends

Required Measures of Success

Success should be measured not by announcements, condolence visits, or temporary security deployments, but by tangible improvements in the safety and well-being of affected communities. Key indicators should include sustained reductions in killings, abductions, and attacks on civilian populations; faster and more effective responses to verified early-warning reports; increased investigations, arrests, prosecutions, and convictions of perpetrators, commanders, financiers, and any officials found to have materially enabled violence; and the disruption of militant networks and support structures.

Additional measures should include the number of occupied communities secured and held, the voluntary return of displaced families to their homes, the restoration of property rights and livelihoods, the reconstruction of homes, schools, clinics, churches, and agricultural infrastructure, and a measurable decline in repeat displacement. The ultimate test of success is whether affected communities can live, worship, farm, travel, and educate their children in safety and whether those responsible for violence face credible accountability under the rule of law.

Methodology, Limitations, and Sources

The primary statistics presented in this edition are drawn from Equipping The Persecuted (ETP), TruthNigeria, and the Nigeria Terror Tracker (NTT). ORFA is used exclusively as an independent, longer-term source for corroborating perpetrator patterns and addressing methodological questions.

TruthNigeria's reporting is based on eyewitness testimony and information gathered through field investigations conducted by its reporting team and trusted local contacts. Verification may include survivor and family interviews, church and community records, photographs, video evidence, burial and medical records, official confirmations, geolocation data, and follow-up reporting where available. When casualty figures conflict, incidents are held for further reconciliation, and the lowest verified figure is retained until additional evidence permits a confirmed revision.

The early-warning and public-alert review examined all eleven pages of the TruthNigeria Security Alerts archive and supplemented those findings with a sitewide review of warnings and alerts published outside the archive category. The review identified 128 unique archive entries and an additional 35 direct alert or warning notices. Duplicate entries, retrospective analyses, and articles focused primarily on alerts issued by external organizations were excluded. The resulting total of 163 published alerts and warning notices is distinct from the more than 200 operational alerts maintained in Equipping The Persecuted's records, as some warnings are distributed directly to affected communities and partners rather than published publicly.

For year-to-year perpetrator comparisons, this report relies on the verified incident dataset maintained by the Nigeria Terror Tracker (NTT). The NTT dataset allows consistent filtering by date, location, and actor category across reporting periods and is used exclusively for comparative trend analysis. NTT fatality figures and the Equipping The Persecuted Christian-death registry serve different analytical purposes and should not be treated as interchangeable datasets or combined into a single casualty total.

Actor attribution throughout this report is based on the best available evidence for each incident. Where available information does not support attribution to a named actor, incidents remain classified as unidentified. The terms Fulani Ethnic Militia, Fulani Terror Groups, and Fulani-linked actors refer exclusively to armed militant networks and organized violent actors identified through incident-level evidence. These terms do not assign collective responsibility to Fulani civilians or to the Fulani population as a whole. The report's recommendations are directed at confronting and dismantling violent militant networks while protecting the rights and security of all civilians regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Sources

- [1] TruthNigeria, Terrorist Attacks Surge Across Nigeria as Army Issues Red Alert for Coordinated Strikes, September 14, 2026.
- [2] Equipping The Persecuted consolidated field casualty register, displacement estimate, destroyed-community count, and operational early-warning records, current through the stated reporting cutoffs.
- [3] Nigeria Terror Tracker live map, verified incident records filtered for January 1 to September 7 in 2025 and 2026 and by actor and sub-actor category.
- [4] TruthNigeria, Islamist Fulani Militia Kill 7 Christians 4 Police Officers in Benue State, September 12, 2026. The report records eight Christian residents based on eyewitness and community testimony.
- [5] TruthNigeria, Nigerian Army Warns of Possible Coordinated Terrorist Attacks on Churches Schools and Youth Camps, September 12, 2026.
- [6] Observatory for Religious Freedom in Africa, Nigeria Killings in the Context of Terror 2020 to 2025, and ORFA 2020-2025 killings and abductions methodology notes.
- [7] TruthNigeria public alert audit, June 2023 through September 14, 2026. The count includes 128 unique Security Alerts archive posts and 35 additional direct alert or warning notices published elsewhere on the site.
- [8] U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2026 Annual Report, Nigeria chapter.
- [9] U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, Issue Update: Nonstate Violators of Religious Freedom in Nigeria: Fulani Militants, May 2026.
- [10] Al Jazeera, Armed men kidnap dozens in attacks on Nigerian villages, August 22, 2026, and related central Nigeria attack coverage using generic village/gunmen framing.

ABOUT EQUIPPING THE PERSECUTED

Equipping the Persecuted is a global nonprofit working to end religiously motivated violence against Christians in Nigeria. The organization responds to terrorist attacks within 24 to 48 hours with humanitarian aid, and supports widows, orphans, and displaced children through its schools and orphanage.

Its independent outlet, TruthNigeria.com, is one of the most trusted sources for breaking news on the persecution. The Truth Nigeria App delivers instant mobile Terror Alerts to those in danger of imminent threats of terrorism.

CONTACTS

Press Inquiries

press@persecuted.com

Policy & Partnership Discussions

Judd Saul

Founder and Executive Director of Equipping the Persecuted

judd@persecuted.com



Persecuted.com



TruthNigeria.com



NTTMap.org