

Nigeria

In Nigeria, approximately half of the population are Muslims, about 40 percent are Christians, and roughly 10 percent are of traditional indigenous religions or no religion. While the constitution guarantees religious freedom, the state endorses numerous anti-secular and theocratic policies. The government and non-state militia such as Boko Haram constantly violate the rights to freedom of thought and expression.

Constitution and government	Education and children's rights	Family, community, society, religious courts and tribunals	Freedom of expression advocacy of humanist values
			<p><u>'Apostasy' or conversion from a specific religion is outlawed and punishable by death</u> <u>'Blasphemy' or criticism of religion is outlawed and punishable by death</u></p>
<p><u>The non-religious are barred from some government offices (including posts reserved for particular religions or sects)</u> <u>State legislation is partly derived from religious law or by religious authorities</u></p>	<p><u>Religious or ideological instruction is mandatory in all or most state-funded schools with no secular or humanist alternative</u></p>	<p><u>The non-religious are persecuted socially or there are prohibitive social taboos against atheism, humanism or secularism</u> <u>Systemic religious privilege results in significant social discrimination</u> <u>Religious control over family law or legislation on moral matters</u> <u>It is made difficult to register or operate an explicitly Humanist, atheist, secularist or other non-religious NGO or other human rights organization</u></p>	<p><u>Expression of core humanist principles on democracy, freedom or human rights is severely restricted</u></p>
<p><u>Preferential treatment is given to a religion or religion in general</u></p>		<p><u>Some religious courts rule in civil or family matters on a coercive or discriminatory basis</u> <u>Discriminatory prominence is given to religious bodies, traditions or leaders</u></p>	

Constitution and government

The Nigerian Constitution protects freedom of religion and allows religious conversion. Section 10 of the constitution states, 'The Government of the Federation of a State shall not adopt any religion as State Religion.'

This provision has however occasionally been overlooked by national leaders, with Rivers State Governor Nyesom Wike pronouncing Rivers a Christian state during a speech in June 2019.

<<https://www.pulse.ng/news/local/rivers-is-a-christian-state-says-wike/03wh1jh>>

However, sections 275–279 of the Constitution give constituent states the power to establish their own Sharia courts on civil matters. Abiding by Sharia law is required for Muslims in some states but optional in others and enforcement differs by state. Rulings and procedures are sometimes difficult to find. Christians are not obliged to abide by Sharia law in any of the 12 states.

Proselytizing in public is illegal in some states, on the grounds that it deters ethnic conflict. Religious groups are required to have permits to build places for worship and hold public gatherings. Christian and Islamic groups are required to register with the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) to do so. Religious discrimination is prohibited by law, but there are significant inter-religious social tensions.

In several instances, politicians have been reported to refer to religion when justifying their stance on legislative proposals and in other political contexts: in 2017, the MP Gudaji Kazaure declared to be against family planning as the latter is against Islamic doctrine, and cited Prophet Muhammad's words "Marry and have children so that I can be proud of you on the day of judgement". In 2019, a video of Senator Dino Melaye was circulated in social media showing him campaigning in his home state and reciting the first chapter of the Quran in its Arabic dialect to a roaring Muslim campaign mob.

<youtube.com/watch?v=06xexylbImw>

<bellanaija.com/2017/10/muslim-family-planning-gudaji-kazaure/>

Education and children's rights

It is a requirement for all students in the public education system to receive instruction either about Christianity or Islam, though the constitution states that institutions cannot subject students to instruction in a religion other than that inherited from their family. In practice, Christian education classes are not offered in many Northern states and Muslim education classes are not always provided in Southern states.

The Constitution states:

"Section 38:2 No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in, or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion not approved by his parent or guardian."

"Section 38:3 No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination."

<nigeria-law.org/ConstitutionOfTheFederalRepublicOfNigeria.htm#Chapter_4>

According to the constitution students are not obliged to receive education of a religion that is not their own. However, Islamic or Christian religious education is mandatory in public school students

in many regions in the country. State authorities sometimes claim that students are allowed to not attend religious instruction or to request a teacher to offer alternative instruction. However, there has been a lack of teachers in 'Christian Religious Knowledge' in many schools in the north, and there has been reports that Muslim students could not access 'Islamic Religious Knowledge' in public schools in Enugu and Edo States. There seems to be an underlying assumption that people in the country are either Christian or Muslim, and must receive religious instruction in one or the other religion.

<ncbuy.com/reference/country/humanrights.html?code=ni&sec=2c>

On 8 September 2018, the 52nd anniversary of Literacy Day as declared by UNESCO, the Nigerian Minister of Education Adamu Adamu declared that Nigeria has about 60 million illiterate youth and adults (about one third of the entire Nigerian population), 60% of which are females. He also underlined that 11 million children are out of school, and he called for urgent attention to this matter as the country strives for the attainment of the SDGs by 2030.

<allafrica.com/stories/201812060012.html>

In the same year, the Minister also brought forward a reform to the school curriculum, introducing an umbrella subject called 'Religion and National Values Curriculum', which includes five subjects, taught separately: Civic Education, Social Studies, Christian Religious Knowledge, Islamic Studies and Security Education. The reform also made Civic Education a compulsory subject.

<legit.ng/1168651-nigerian-curriculum-secondary-schools-2018.html>

In 2019, a number of Islamic rehabilitation schools (Almajiris) across northern Nigeria were discovered to be torturing and abusing hundreds of children, beating them and keeping them chained to walls. The Nigerian police freed more than 1000 people from these centres in October 2019 alone, but thousands of other children could be at risk as about 10 million children are estimated to attend Almajiris schools across the country. President Buhari has ordered the police to search for these abusive centres and disband them.

<reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-captives/police-free-hundreds-of-males-some-chained-and-beaten-from-nigerian-school-in-third-raid-this-month-idUSKBN1WV23B>

Family, community and society

The introduction of criminal law aspects of Shari'a, the continued state use of resources to fund the mosque construction, education of Kadis (Muslim judges), pilgrimages to Mecca (Hajj), and religious instruction in schools, mean that Islam is often regarded, and is in effect, the de facto state religion of numerous northern states.

Some states had also used government funds to pay for Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem. In general, states with a Christian or Muslim majority favour and give privileges to the majority faith, to the exclusion of religion or belief minorities.

Sectarian divide

Muslims in some predominantly Christian states have complained about being denied permission to build mosques in predominantly Christian southern states. Christians in the predominantly Muslim northern states have claimed that local government officials used zoning laws to delay or prevent the establishment of new churches. Some have made claims that the enforcement of zoning laws was selective. Government officials have been commonly reported to have discriminated against people whose religious beliefs are different from their own, notably in hiring or contract awarding. Religious and ethnic discrimination also exist in private businesses' hiring practices and purchasing patterns.

The deep entanglement of religion and state perpetuates parallel legal systems for different religious and ethnic groups and Sharia judgments' arbitrary nature have raised questions concerning legislation. Whether politically, ethnically, and religiously fragmented Nigeria can survive official Sharia institutions' internal contradictions remains uncertain.

<evangelicalfellowship.ca/page.aspx?pid=684>

<democracyweb.org/religion/nigeria.php>

<ncbuy.com/reference/country/humanrights.html?code=ni&sec=2c>

Boko Haram

The country has been afflicted in recent years by the terrorism of Boko Haram, with abductions, massacres and bomb blasts in Abuja. The abduction of around 200 school girls early in 2014 by Boko Haram prompted the sharing of the #BringBackOurGirls hashtag around the world, but most abductees from Chibok and other towns remain lost. The government and armed forces were accused of hesitation, inaction and incompetence in addressing the terrorist threat; and deaths and kidnappings number in the thousands. Sectarian tension was on the rise in 2014 and attacks continued in 2015. Boko Haram caused more deaths in terror attacks in 2014 than ISIS. A more concerted military response in 2015 and 2016 appears to have diminished Boko Haram's strength.

In spring 2018, Boko Haram took about one hundred more girls from a secondary school in the town of Dapchi, just south of the Sahara, in the state of Yobe. The convoy took them to the edges of lake Chad, where the splinter group loyal to ISIS in Syria-Iraq resides. After more than a month, the terrorist group eventually returned the girls, in broad daylight, to their parents, declaring, as one parent reported: "We have now returned your children to you but make sure you don't enrol them in western education again because if you do we will come back and take them away". Some youths, soon after the sermon in the middle of the town, joined the convoy and swore fealty afterwards, going back to their base, where they keep territory and receive IS runaways from the Middle East and Libya.

<bbc.co.uk/news/43489217>

Freedom of expression, advocacy of humanist values

Nigeria has "one of the most vibrant and varied media landscapes in Africa" according to Freedom House, with press that are usually willing and able to criticise at least the most unpopular government policies, for example. However, there is sometimes interference by officials and regulators in response to critical coverage of sensitive policies such as corruption and national security.

<freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press/2016/nigeria>

Religious intimidation, violence and impunity

In January 2016, a Sharia court in Kano state (northern Nigeria) handed a death sentence for "blasphemy" to a Muslim cleric, Abdulzeez Dauda, an adherent of a local faction of the Tijaniya sect, founded in Senegal by Sheikh Ibrahim Niasse. In a secretive trial, Dauda was accused of saying that "Niase was bigger than Prophet Muhammad". Rumours of this "blasphemy" had earlier sparked violent protests in Kano city, and during the trial of Dauda's followers there were clashes, and the court was set on fire. Dauda was sentenced to death in January; several of his followers had already been sentenced to death for the same "blasphemy" in 2015. The governor of Kano state welcomed the ruling as a "triumph of the rule of law".

<bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-35241608>

<globalvoices.org/2015/07/02/nigerians-are-shocked-by-the-kano-nine-death-sentence-for-

[blasphemy/>](#)

The same pattern of religious intimidation, violence, and impunity occurred again in 2016, on 2 June, with the murder of a female Christian market trader, again in Kano state. She was reportedly hacked to death by five Muslims who accused her of “blasphemy” against the prophet Mohammed. The Sharia court acquitted all five accused of the gruesome murder.

<conatusnews.com/why-is-there-no-justice-for-victims-of-blasphemy-killings-in-nigeria-.html>

Highlighted cases

In June 2014, **Mubarak Bala** was assessed as needing psychiatric help because he was “an atheist”, and held against his will at a psychiatric ward in Kano, northern Nigeria. His father, formerly a senior member of the Islamic religious authorities, had orchestrated Mubarak’s detention, after Mubarak had refused to keep quiet about his atheistic views on religion. Mubarak was – with some violence – bundled off to the psychiatric hospital by members of his own family. Told that he could not leave the hospital, Mubarak raised the alarm by social media, on a mobile he had managed to smuggle and keep hidden from the staff. He tweeted about his circumstances to friends and followers. IHEU worked with online activists and local humanists to verify the case, instruct a lawyer, and propel Mubarak’s cries for help into international media. His case then received media attention locally. Bala was freed after nearly three weeks, due to a strike at the hospital. Mubarak said that the domestic and international pressure helped to convince his family that he must be free to be, and express himself as, an atheist.

<iheu.org/?s=mubarak+bala>

<bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-28158813>

The **Nigerian Humanist Movement** has been denied registration as an organization for many years. Antagonists have linked the group to gay rights, presuming this to stand against its merits (and in reality it may well contribute to authorities’ refusal to progress a registration).

<gamji.com/article9000/news9553.htm>

<dialogueseriesnew.blogspot.de/2011/10/usa-africa-dialogue-series-humanism-and.html>

In 2017, the Nigerian Humanist Association was eventually granted formal recognition after 17 years of campaigning, together with other humanist/atheist groups, including the Northern Nigeria Humanist Movement, the Atheist Society of Nigeria and Lagos Humanists.

<humanists.international/2017/12/humanist-association-nigeria-achieves-formal-recognition-17-year-campaign/>