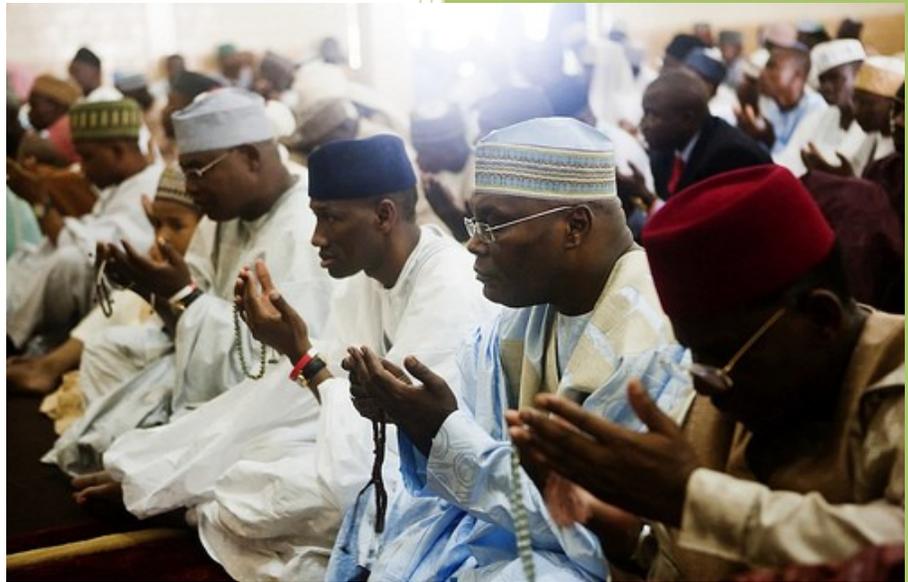


# 2016

## Country Profile: Nigeria



Religious Literacy Project  
Harvard Divinity School  
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"Atiku Campaign 2011," Atiku Abubakar  
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The Religious Literacy Project is directed by Diane L. Moore and all content is constructed under her editorial direction.

"Notable of Sultan Alhaji Dr. Abubakar Isa Ahmadu, Emir of Mubi, Nigeria," by Alfred Weidinger

## Overview

Nigeria is a large country both in terms of size, population, and importance on both a regional and global scale, and few issues are as central to the national ethos as religion. Religious practice in Nigeria is just as varied and diverse as the population, creating a complex and fascinating situation that arises from its “triple heritage,” of indigenous religious traditions, Islam, and Christianity. Nigeria has over 270 ethnic groups who speak over 370 languages. While it has been suggested that about half of the population is [Muslim](#), 40–45% is [Christian](#), and 5–10% practice [indigenous religious traditions](#), none of these figures can be accurately validated, and they are more speculations than fact. This is particularly true given that involvement to one degree or another in more than one religious tradition is common. Regionally, there is a perceived cultural, economic, and political split between Nigeria’s north and south, which is a direct legacy of British colonial policy and uneven regional development.

While the North is largely Muslim and the South is largely Christian, the religious demographics of the country are far more complex than the north/south binary implies. It is true that Islam is deeply entrenched in the North, with many different strands and beliefs represented from widespread affiliation with Sufi brotherhoods, to Salafi interpretations of Islam that reject Sufism, small [Shi’a](#) communities, and various interactions with indigenous beliefs.

There is a sizable Christian minority in several northern states (mostly migrants from the southern areas of the country), though this population is shrinking as Christians flee from violence. Christianity, predominantly comprising [Catholicism](#) and [Anglicanism](#), prevails in the Southeast but southwestern Nigeria is mixed, with substantial Muslim, Christian, and traditional religious communities. The “Middle Belt,” an area encompassing six states, is populated largely by ethnic minorities and is also highly religiously diverse.

Contemporary conflicts are frequently cast in narrowly-defined religious terms, but this representation fails to include how great economic disparities give shape to tensions. It is more accurate to say that those who have consolidated power and political influence—often by leveraging their religious and ethnic affiliations—have benefited economically, while the vast majority of the population is economically marginalized and competes for limited resources in a context of economic injustice and widespread corruption. Though economic development, particularly that derived from the 1970s oil boom, has enriched some communities in the North and the South, wealth tends to be mainly controlled by a small, wealthy minority found in both the northern and southern parts of the country, with very little trickling down to the vast majority of the population.<sup>1</sup>

The disproportionate balance of political power and wealth in the country and the efforts of religious exclusivists—those who maintain that their particular religious tradition is the right and only tradition—have contributed to a rise in conflict. Between 2011–13, violence (predominantly against other Muslims, but also Christians) initiated by [Boko Haram](#) against other Muslims as well as Christians, reached crisis proportions in the Northeast. There has also been continued Muslim-Christian strife in the Middle Belt, resulting in thousands of deaths and increasing numbers of refugees reported in both of these regions. [Anti-corporate protests](#) in the South against multinational oil companies continues until the present day, and is taking on religious overtones as one of the largest groups also threatened to attack Muslim targets in retaliation for Boko Haram violence against Christians in the North. It is important to note, however, that there are multiple anti-corporate resistance groups led by Christians, Muslims, and followers of indigenous religions.

Most Nigerians celebrate the impressive diversity of their nation and many support integrative policies to heal the deep divisions left in the wake of British colonialism. However, the increasing polarization and stratification along religious, ethnic, and regional lines are a serious threat to stability. While former president Goodluck Jonathan repeatedly expressed his commitment to religious freedom, insiders and outsiders questioned his offensives in the North against Boko Haram by military forces that led to the deaths of countless innocent civilians and caused many to flee as refugees. Additionally, Jonathan's economic policies failed to stimulate significant growth or opportunity for everyday Nigerians, and thus conflict with religious overtones continued as resources dwindled under his leadership.

In May of 2015, Jonathan lost the election to Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the All Progressives Congress party who is a retired Army Major General, and who was head of state between 1983–1985 after taking power through a military coup d'etat.

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<sup>1</sup> British Council, "Gender in Nigeria Report 2012," *British Council* (2012); Sudharshan Canagarajah and Saji Thomas, "Poverty in a Wealthy Economy: the Case of Nigeria," *Journal of African Economics*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (2001), pp. 143–173.

One of Jonathan's last acts as President of Nigeria was to outlaw FGM (female genital mutilation), a nonmedical practice that entails the removal of the external genitalia of girls and young women. According to UNICEF, Nigeria accounts for almost a quarter of women affected by FGM globally.<sup>2</sup> FGM causes pain, possible infection, infertility, birth complications, and prevents sexual pleasure. FGM is thus thought to protect young women from promiscuity, and preserve their virginities until marriage. (The premarital virginity of women in Nigeria is of high cultural and social importance.)

In Nigeria FGM is slightly more common in the southern, predominantly Christian regions, but it is practiced within both Christian and Muslim communities across the country. The ban of FGM in Nigeria was reached by culmination of the efforts of organizations such as the Inter-African Committee, UNICEF, and the World Health Organization (WHO), together with Muslim and Christian groups.<sup>3</sup> Christians belonging to the Seventh Day Adventist tradition in Nigeria have been particularly outspoken against FGM, and cite the Bible in their rejection of the practice.

The prohibition of FGM in Nigeria is a great success for anti-FGM campaigners, who seek to outlaw the practice elsewhere in Africa, where it is common, as well as in parts of the Middle East and Asia. These campaigns are often interfaith efforts, given that FGM is practiced in multiple religious contexts.

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<sup>2</sup> "Nigeria: Female Genital Mutilation Fact Sheet," *UNICEF*, n.d., [http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/FGM\\_.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/nigeria/FGM_.pdf), accessed February 19, 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Banchoff and Robert Wuthnow, *Religion and the Global Politics of Human Rights* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 141.

## Historical Legacies

No two historical factors have been more deeply implicated in contemporary struggles between Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious groups than British colonialism and the [transatlantic slave trade](#). The slave trade triggered unprecedented internal competition as groups defined themselves in contradistinction to others who could be enslaved. Additionally, slavery fostered greater contact with European merchants and stimulated European mercantilism and economic interest along the southern coast, thus laying the groundwork for colonialism and the economic changes it would bring.

Slavery, albeit in a much different form, was practiced in Africa independent of the transatlantic trade, which lasted from the late 15<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Slavery was permissible under [Islamic law](#), although the enslavement of fellow Muslims was not and freeing slaves was considered a highly praiseworthy act.<sup>4</sup> In the royal households of the Sokoto Caliphate, established in 1804, slaves were able to acquire prestige and even positions of military and administrative power by virtue of their close relationships and kinship ties with Sokoto leaders, similar to slaves in the Ottoman Empire, and in some cities in Northern Nigeria more than half of the population could have been considered slaves.<sup>3</sup> Domestic slavery was prevalent in [Yorubaland](#) from at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, one form of which was *iwofa*, where an adult or child was pawned to settle a debt and then freed afterwards.<sup>5</sup> Thus, there were various types of indenture and slavery that differed from the system of chattel slavery developed in North America and the Caribbean.

Compared to the domestic forms of slavery outlined above, the magnitude of the transatlantic slave trade was far more destructive because through that vehicle West Africa's power structures, economic relationships, and cultural patterns were radically reordered. European merchants hired local brokers, particularly among the Ayo, Oyo, and [Hausa](#), to provide captive Africans, which triggered predatory internal struggles between groups and internecine warfare within groups to produce captives. The long-standing trans-Saharan trade route became a raiding station, thereby disrupting centuries-old trade patterns. Also, slavery encouraged militarization and stratification, leading to the rise of warlords.

By the time the British outlawed slavery in 1807, northern Nigeria was deeply militarized and stratified. Lagos and other coastal cities in the southern Delta region had risen as important economic hubs where African merchants had longstanding European contact, setting the stage for polarization in the coming years. Throughout Nigeria, traditional leadership structures had been shuffled and even dismantled, leading to vulnerabilities and violence that left the country ripe for colonization.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Humphrey J. Fisher, *Slavery in the History of Muslim Black Africa* (New York: New York University Press, 2001). Sean Stilwell, "The Development of 'Mamluk' Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," in *Slavery on the Frontiers of Islam*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy, (Princeton: Marcus Wiener Press, 2004), pp. 87–110.

<sup>5</sup> Toyin Falola and Akanmu Adebayo, *Culture, Politics, and Money Among the Yoruba* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> Toyin Falola and Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

## The Colonial Era (1882–1960)

British colonialism began under the pretense of policing the [slave trade](#). Britain outlawed slavery in 1807 and pushed for forms of “legitimate commerce” such as palm oil and cotton, and in so doing developed an internal infrastructure to facilitate these markets. By the 1820s, the British had made connections with the Sokoto Caliphate, whose highly structured society, aristocracy, and religion struck colonial administrators as more “civilized” than the war-torn groups they encountered in the South. With the discovery of quinine in the 1850s, colonial explorers and missionaries who had been unable to enter the southern interior due to risk of malaria began contacting a wider range of groups; the British then had treaties and trade policies in place throughout the North and the South.

In the 1850s, the British used trade policies to influence African politics, including deposing rulers who stood in the way of the lucrative palm oil trade. In the 1880s, competition with French colonial powers in Africa prompted a policy shift and in 1882 the northern and southern “protectorates” were established. During the Berlin Conference of 1884–1885, European leaders determined who had rights to what “spheres of influence.” The two protectorates were joined in 1914 under British governor-general Frederick Lugard, and the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria was established. 2014 marks Nigeria’s grand celebration of the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the union between the northern and southern regions.

Lugard instituted a policy of indirect rule through native authorities, who collected taxes and performed other local administrative tasks. In the North, Lugard worked through the [Fulani](#) ruling classes, who used the British in order to retain their power and to acquire wealth. Because rulers were no longer accountable to their people, corruption and poverty spread. Many [Muslims](#) began to see the Fulani leadership as pawns—a sentiment echoed today by members of Islamist movements towards northern leadership. British favoritism towards Muslims, combined with Hausa-Fulani advances into the Middle Belt, led to widespread conversion to Islam.

At the same time, a rising African intelligentsia—graduates of Christian missionary schools—began to challenge British rule in the South. [Christianity](#) spread rapidly at the grassroots level from the 1860s onwards, in large part due to the mission education system. Colonial administrators encouraged conversion to Christianity in the South, especially [Anglicanism](#), as part of their mandate to “civilize” Africa. Mission schools became training grounds for the intellectual, commercial, civic, and military elites, who tended to be promoted by the British colonial government and who would be at the forefront of the nationalist movement. However, at the



Frederick John Dealtry Lugard, Vanity Fair, 1895, "Vanity Fair, from Wikimedia Commons.

insistence of Hausa-Fulani leaders in the North, the British barred Christian missionaries from proselytizing there, which meant that Western education was limited to Nigeria's South. It also resulted in a preponderance of Christians among Nigeria's nationalists.

After WWII the British began to see that colonialism was no longer pragmatic in Nigeria, and responded to the protests from returned ex-servicemen who had fought alongside the British in the war by instituting a series of changes meant to develop a federal government. In 1954, the Lyttleton Constitution cemented a federal system with three self-governing states under weak central control. This included a large northern state and smaller eastern and western states, which reflected the three regional units managed separately and differently by the colonial administration. While they loosely corresponded with major ethnic groups, the borders were not intended to demarcate ethnicity and they arbitrarily cut across ethnic and linguistic communities. As the British never prioritized fostering unity among Nigeria's disparate peoples, colonialism left Nigeria deeply divided.<sup>7</sup>

For Nigerians, access to colonial resources was determined by the relative strength of their identity groups in relation to British power, and this fostered competition. In the South, Nigerians had benefited from missionary education and saw economic growth, urbanization, and the rise of a skilled middle class. Christianity dominated, though there were significant Muslim and [indigenous religious](#) communities as well. The larger but more insular North had extensive agricultural production, little access to Western education and rampant poverty. Mutual distrust was pervasive on the eve of independence.

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<sup>7</sup> Adiele E. Afigbo, "Background to Nigerian Federalism: Federal Features in the Colonial State," *Publius*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (1991), pp. 13-29.

## Independence & Modern Political Rule (1960–present)



"Abubakar Tafawa Balewa,"  
Nigerian Government image  
(1962), from Wikimedia Commons.

At independence in 1960, appeals to regional identity, ethnicity, and religion became the most salient means of mobilizing political support. Early nationalists shared a vision of a unified Nigeria, but competition for political power and access to economic resources in an immensely divided state made this impossible. Indeed, not all politicians sought independence—many were afraid of losing power granted to them by the British and therefore resisted a central government. This was especially true of the North, which feared ascendancy by the much more economically developed South. In response, northern politicians promoted a shared [Islamic](#) identity, while some Middle Belt groups converted to [Christianity](#) to resist Islamization and to join a rising Christian political elite. The First Republic was composed of multiple regionally-based parties led by a coalition government headed by Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, a passionate advocate for northern interests. He was

joined by Ahmadu Bello, who pursued a “One North, One Islam” Islamization policy that endeavored to unify northern Muslims behind an umbrella organization, the [Jama’tu Nasril Islam \(JNI\)](#).<sup>8</sup> The heavy representation of the North in the post-independence government was a result of its massive size, and therefore the greater number of northern politicians in the House of Representatives (174 out of 312), which led to resentment in the south and east. Some Christians felt betrayed that Britain didn’t ensure the ascendancy of Christian groups, assuming that as a “Christian” country it would put more weight behind coreligionists’ interests.<sup>9</sup>

This first government was ousted in a bloody military coup in 1966, which members of the JNI perceived as being led by the Christian Igbo, prompting widespread fear in the North that Muslims were being politically disempowered. Violent retaliation against the Igbo ensued, which was a major factor leading to the secession of the largely Igbo [Republic of Biafra](#) (it also contained several non-Igbo ethnic groups in the Southeast), and subsequent civil war that nearly tore the nation apart and killed over a million Nigerians.<sup>10</sup> The civil war was framed by its leader, Lieutenant Colonel—later General—O. C. Ojukwu, as a religious conflict (Christians against hegemonic northern Muslim power). The war devastated the East, with echoes to this day. Following the civil war, Yakubu Gowon, the Chief of Staff of the Army and a Middle Belt Christian, took over Nigeria’s leadership. Over the next thirty years, the Nigerian government passed between various military dictatorships, though some were more inclined towards democracy than others.

<sup>8</sup> Don Ohadike, “Muslim-Christian Conflict and Political Instability in Nigeria,” in *Religion and National Integration in Nigeria: Islam, Christianity, and Politics in the Sudan and Nigeria*, ed. John O. Hunwick (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1992), pp. 101–124.

<sup>9</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 90.

<sup>10</sup> Barnaby Philips, “Biafra: Thirty Years On,” *BBC*, January 13, 2000, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/596712.stm>, accessed November 22, 2013; Trevor Rubenzer, “Nigeria: 1967–1970,” in *Civil Wars of the World: Major Conflicts Since World War II*, eds. Karl DeRouen and Uk Heo (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2007), pp. 567–584.

Following a decision by the military to annul elections in 1993 [General Sani Abacha](#), a northern Muslim), seized power. General Abacha's time in office is remembered as one of the worst periods in contemporary Nigerian history; his government was accused of corruption and various human rights violations, perhaps the most notable being the hanging of Ogoni activist [Ken Saro-Wiwa](#), an important figure in the protest movement against multinational oil companies (in particular the Royal Dutch Shell Group) for their exploitation of the Niger Delta. Following Abacha's death in 1998, Nigeria's Defense Chief of Staff Major General Abdulsalami Abubakar stepped in and announced a transition to democracy. In 1999 former military leader and People's Democratic Party member [Olusegun Obasanjo](#) (a [Baptist Christian](#) and [Yoruba](#) from the Southwest) won the presidency.

Nigerians have held democratic elections in 1999, 2003, 2007, 2011 and 2015, though each election has been followed by a stormy aftermath. Some of the anger in recent elections comes from the fact that they have seemed to upend the unwritten rule of Nigerian politics; the People's Democratic Party—which has since 1999 consistently fielded the winning candidate—would alternate candidacy between southerners and northerners. Goodluck Jonathan (a Christian from the Ijaw people of the southern delta region) had been elected vice president in the 2007 election, and assumed power in 2010 after the sudden death of late President Umaru Yar'Adua. In 2011, Jonathan went on to win the election outright and ran for re-election in 2015 where he was defeated by Muhammadu Buhari, a Muslim from the All Progressives Congress party.

Muhammadu Buhari won the presidential election in March 2015, after the election had been delayed because of Boko Haram insurgency. Aged seventy-two, the former military ruler is the first opposition candidate to win an election in Nigeria, and he won by a margin of 2.5 million votes over his opponent Goodluck Jonathan.<sup>11</sup> Buhari is a Muslim with strong support in the North of Nigeria. He appointed Yemi Osinbajo, a Christian, as his Vice-President in a show of interfaith collaboration. It is a common, though unfixed, trend for the President to appoint a Vice President belonging to the alternate religious tradition. Jonathan, a Christian, had a Muslim Vice-President when he was in power.

His military background seems to have appealed to voters in the midst of the ongoing conflict with Boko Haram. Buhari's current role as President is preceded by three election losses (2003, 2007, and 2011), in addition to a short-lived military coup in 1983–1985. As leader of Nigeria in the '80s, Buhari implemented an austere economic policy, and was known for his hardline disciplinarian tactics. (Civil servants who arrived late for work were reportedly forced to do frog jumps in the office.)<sup>12</sup> His rule was ended by Ibrahim Babangida, and was largely motivated by a widespread dissatisfaction with the economy.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "Muhammadu Buhari," *Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammadu-Buhari>, accessed 12 February, 2016.

<sup>12</sup> "Nigeria's Muhammadu Buhari in profile," *BBC*, March 30, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-12890807>, accessed 12 February, 2016.

<sup>13</sup> "Muhammadu Buhari," *Britannica*, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/Muhammadu-Buhari>, accessed 12 February, 2016.

## Emerging Religious Movements

Due to an economic downturn spurred by falling oil prices the 1980s, the state failed to provide basic services to most Nigerians, and this led many to question the state's secular foundations. This period saw the emergence of Islamist movements, most notably the Izala, which was made up largely by the urban poor, and which received financial support from Islamists in Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iraq.<sup>14</sup> Leaders of the Izala accused the government of using secularism to promote [Christian](#) agendas, channeling economic resources to Christians, and stifling Muslims' ambitions to live a godly life. Corruption and poverty were the signs that secularism had failed, and many Muslims felt that only an Islamic government could restore justice. They asserted that since Nigeria is majority [Muslim](#), the government should reflect certain Islamic ideals that they claimed the sole authority to determine. Their interpretations excluded various other interpretations of Islam, most notably Sufism. They pointed to the national celebration of Christian holidays and the weekend's inclusion of Sunday, among other things, as evidence that the "secular" government was in fact based on a European Christian and colonial model, and was therefore inherently discriminatory towards Muslims.<sup>15</sup> However, Nigeria equally observes and celebrates Muslim holidays and festivals. For example, the federal government subsidizes and organizes both Muslims pilgrimages to Mecca during the Hajj and Christian pilgrimages to Jerusalem. Some do not approve of a secular government at all with or without the socio-economic "proof" of its failure, and prefer religion-based forms of governance.



A UNAMID peacekeeper from Nigeria prays and sings at the Christian Protestant church at the UNAMID base in El Daein, East Darfur. From UNAMID, Flickr Creative Commons.

New exclusivist Christian movements also took shape in the 1970s and 1980s, partly influenced by the rise of Evangelicalism and [Pentecostalism](#) in the United States and Britain in the 1960s (and their missionary efforts in Nigeria). These movements increased rural-to-urban migration, the economic changes and growing conspicuous consumption that accompanied the oil boom, the political culture of military dictatorship and widespread corruption, and by fears of the occult that were culturally associated with some of these other factors.<sup>16</sup> These transnational movements provided "born-again" converts with this-worldly salvation, emphasizing "[health and wealth](#)," modernity, and individualism while condemning perceived demonic forces, including Muslims, and those who pursue ill-gotten financial and political gains.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Olufemi Vaughan, "Ethno-Regionalism and the Origins of Federalism in Nigeria," in *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations*, ed. Wale Adebani and Ebenezer Obadare (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> April A. Gordon, *Nigeria's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2003).

<sup>16</sup> Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, p. 240–241; Matthews A. Ojo, "The Contextual Significance of the Charismatic Movements in Independent Nigeria," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 58, No. 2 (1988), pp. 175–192.

<sup>17</sup> Ruth Marshall, *Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2009), p. 100–103.

The Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), an umbrella group of various Christian denominations, opposed efforts to institutionalize and expand Islamic law and fiercely protested Nigeria's membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) in 1986. Both Christian and Muslim exclusivists taught that members of the other faith received preferential treatment and economic resources from the government, a message that further undermined the legitimacy of the secular state. The Pentecostal/Evangelical movement is perhaps even more outspoken in its renunciation of indigenous religions as demonic. Some find this stance ironic because it relies to a certain extent on these traditions to define itself in contradistinction to them. Some also find similarities in the worldview and worship of this movement and indigenous traditions although the movement stresses a complete break from any and all traditional practices, concepts, and ideas.<sup>18</sup>

In 2002 an indigenous northern Islamist group referred to as [Boko Haram](#) was formed and in 2009 began attacking police and army targets.<sup>19</sup> They have directly compared the Nigerian government to the colonial government, and have expanded targets to include other Muslims, Christians, media outlets, government offices, and a United Nations office. In 2004, a state of emergency was declared in the central Plateau state after more than 200 Muslims were killed in Yelwa in attacks by Christian militias; revenge attacks were launched by Muslim youths in Kano.<sup>20</sup> These cycles of retributive violence marked the beginnings of deepening conflict among Christians and Muslims in the northern and Middle Belt regions, which threaten to spill over into the South.

In April of 2014 Boko Haram kidnapped over 200 young girls who were attending boarding school in Chibok. This mass kidnapping prompted global media coverage, and social media campaigns were launched with the hashtag “#bringbackourgirls.” High-profile figures such as Michelle Obama became involved, and eventually Britain and the United States sent planes to search for the kidnapped girls of Chibok.<sup>21</sup> The girls have still not been returned to their families, though a few managed to escape. Boko Haram claims that they have forced the girls into marriages and cannot locate them.

In early 2015 the group killed approximately 2,000 people in a small town called Bagu, near the northern city of Maiduguri. Due to the continued threat of Boko Haram to Nigeria, especially in the Northeast, Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger formed a military coalition in 2015. The coalition achieved substantial success, and the Nigerian army went on to seize Boko Haram's alleged stronghold, Gwoza.

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<sup>18</sup> Jacob K. Olupona, “Bonds, Boundaries, and Bondage of Faith: Religion at the Crossroads in Nigeria,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Vol. 41, No. 2 & 3 (2013), pp. 20–30.

<sup>19</sup> “Boko haram timeline: From preachers to slave raiders,” *BBC News*, May 15, 2013, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-22538888>, accessed November 22, 2013.

<sup>20</sup> Said Adejumo, *State, Economy, and Society in Post-Military Nigeria* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> “Nigeria profile – Timeline,” *BBC*, 12 June, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13951696>, accessed 12 February, 2016.

UNICEF has reported that approximately 800,000 children have been displaced as a result of the conflict with Boko Haram.<sup>22</sup> The militant group itself has also started enlisting children as cooks, combatants, and sex slaves. The group's use of young girls became particularly evident in 2016, when three girls wearing suicide vests were sent to a refugee camp and killed thirty-eight people.<sup>23</sup> One of the three girls managed to escape Boko Haram without activating her suicide vest, and explained how she was held captive. *The Guardian* reports that, over a six-year period, Boko Haram has killed 20,000 people and displaced 2.5 million others.<sup>24</sup>

The Boko Haram conflict has fostered animosity among some persecuted Christian groups in the North, who suspect their Muslim neighbors of supporting Boko Haram.<sup>25</sup> Tensions have also arisen between peaceful minority Shi'ite Muslims and the Nigerian military. The Nigerian Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs (NSCIA) has reported concerns that the military could trigger a revolt, after it killed hundreds of Shi'ites in Zaria.

In the midst of this antipathy and fear, Muslims and Christians—both of whom have been targeted by Boko Haram—have united in opposition to the group. Sheikh Adam Albani, a prominent Muslim cleric who spoke out against the group's actions, was subsequently assassinated in 2014. Consequences such as these have likely discouraged others from denouncing Boko Haram's actions, although activists do continue to contribute to peacebuilding efforts. Hafsat Mohammed, for example, has set up an NGO called Choice for Peace, Gender and Development, in spite of repeated threats to her safety.<sup>26</sup> The aim of Mohammed's organization is to help young people and women whose family members have been taken by Boko Haram. Mohammed has also worked closely with the much-celebrated Interfaith Meditation Center, which promotes Muslim-Christian dialogue in Nigeria, and about which the film *The Imam and the Pastor* was made. Since 2012, the IMC has been implementing a project entitled: "Training of Leaders on Religious & National Coexistence (TOLERANCE)."

Nearby Cameroon has set up an admirable example of interfaith peacebuilding on its border with Nigeria, where it is vulnerable to attack by Boko Haram; Muslims and Christians take turns to guard one another's place of worship at prayer times.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>22</sup> UNICEF, "800,000 children forced to flee violence in Nigeria and region," April 13, 2015, [http://www.unicef.org/media/media\\_81518.html](http://www.unicef.org/media/media_81518.html), accessed 12 February, 2016.

<sup>23</sup> "Teenager seized for Boko Haram attack tells how she tore off suicide vest and fled," *The Guardian*, February 11, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/12/teenager-seized-for-boko-haram-attack-tells-how-she-tore-off-suicide-vest-and-fled>, accessed 12 February, 2016.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Cristina Silva, "Boko Haram Violence: Christians Take Revenge Against Muslims In Nigeria," *International Business Times*, 4 April, 2015, <http://www.ibtimes.com/boko-haram-violence-christians-take-revenge-against-muslims-nigeria-1874995>, accessed 19 February, 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Cailann Morgan, "Meet the Nigerian woman taking on Boko Haram," *Aljazeera*, 4 November, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/women-make-change/2015/11/151104160651727.html>, accessed 20 February, 2016.

<sup>27</sup> Joe Mellor, "Christians And Muslims Protect Each Other Against Boko Haram," *The London Economic* 16 January, 2016, <http://www.thelondoneconomic.com/news/christians-and-muslims-protect-each-other-against-boko-haram/26/01/>, accessed February 20, 2016.

## Economic Policies & Ideologies

Oil was discovered in the Niger Delta in the late 1950s, and by the 1970s a massive transformation of Nigeria's economy was underway. Oil wealth is channeled to only about 1% of the population, typically Nigerians with entrepreneurial acumen, political influence, and powerful connections, predominantly (though not exclusively) in the South. This sudden influx of incredible wealth has, in part, led Nigerians to use ethnic and religious identity as an assertion of patriotism in their effort to access that wealth. Not surprisingly, the high economic stakes have fostered broad corruption.<sup>28</sup> Increasing violence, tension, and hostility between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria is caused or exacerbated by these gaping economic disparities.

Most of Nigeria's development and job creation has been concentrated in the South, whereas Nigerians in the North have long perceived government neglect, even though it is acknowledged most of the political rulers (particularly heads of state) have come from the North. Some 75% of northerners live in poverty, compared with less than half in the South, though these economic disparities do not fall only along a north-south divide. Indigenous communities who live in oil-producing regions have also been denied access to wealth and power generated by the oil industry. Militant protest movements, particularly among the Ogoni and Ijaw who inhabit the Niger Delta, have brought attention to the gross inequalities and ecological devastation that have accompanied the oil boom. The rebel [Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta \(MEND\)](#) has staged periodic, targeted attacks on pipelines and oil facilities and kidnapped foreign oil workers. In 2013 MEND threatened to attack Muslim targets in retaliation for [Boko Haram](#) violence against Christians in the North. However, while predominantly Christian, anti-corporate activists and rebels include members of various religious faiths.

There has been a collapse of basic infrastructure and social services since the early 1980s, initially as a result of falling oil prices, which has deepened due to neglect of Nigeria's agricultural sector, to political mismanagement, and to massive national debt.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, many Nigerians feel that they are worse off now than they were at independence. The pressures of rapid urbanization and a climate of political corruption and favoritism has resulted in increasing disenfranchisement and a distrust of the central government. In the impoverished North, this phenomenon has led many to question the moral validity of secularism, which is reflected in Islamist calls for Islamic leadership and provides fertile ground for Islamist recruitment efforts.

At the same time, critics suggest that Jonathan is hostage to the powerful interests that helped put him into office (especially the oil industry). While many in the South also struggle, a small elite concentrated around Lagos has grown increasingly wealthy, and is marked by conspicuous consumption of luxury goods.<sup>30</sup> Notably, among the elite are pastors of some of Nigeria's large "prosperity gospel" Pentecostal

<sup>28</sup> Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction*, p. 229.

<sup>29</sup> Gordon, *Nigeria's Diverse Peoples: A Reference Sourcebook*, p. 165.

<sup>30</sup> Mfonobong Nsehe, "Wealthy Nigerians, Pastors Spend \$225 Million On Private Jets," *Forbes*, May 17, 2011, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/mfonobongnsehe/2011/05/17/wealthy-nigerians-pastors-spend-225-million-on->

churches.<sup>31</sup> These wealth disparities fuel resentment against the elite, suspicion against some religious leaders, but also incentivize membership in “health and wealth” churches. At the same time, many of these emerging churches have filled in the gaps left by the failures of the state to provide much needed services and support to its citizens.

Ultimately, while progress is visible in some parts of the country, particularly in the richer, well-governed states such as Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja, poorer states experience rising unemployment and poverty rates, which stokes inter- and intra-religious violence and tension. In spite of promises to end government corruption, many ordinary Nigerians express anger and distrust toward their state and national governments, believing that officials continue to pocket riches rather than allocating them toward development projects that will ensure long-term economic prosperity for all.

Since taking office in 2015, Buhari has continued to uphold the anti-corruption stance he proffered during the election. Corruption is particularly endemic in Nigeria, and is one of the reasons for its stark wealth inequality. One of his ministers, Lai Mohammed, announced that \$6.8 billion in public funds has been stolen from the government. He claimed that of the \$6.8 billion, a sum of \$2.1 billion intended for weaponry to fight Boko Haram was instead used to fund the election campaign of Goodluck Jonathan.<sup>32</sup> In a report entitled “Leaking Revenue,” a charity called ActionAid also revealed that economic corruption and frailty in a different area; Nigeria lost \$3.3 billion through a ten-year tax break granted to three oil and gas companies: Shell, Total and Eni.<sup>33</sup> As a result Buhari has appointed himself the oil minister of his own cabinet, in order to stem further corruption and the loss of even more money. Because Africa’s economy is so reliant on revenue from oil exports, the loss of this money, together with the fall in oil prices in 2015, have posed a substantial threat to economic stability.

## Religion, Political & Legal Structures

Nigeria has had multiple constitutions since the colonial era, which were modeled on the British constitution and, more recently, on the American constitution. The current Nigerian constitution (1999), explicitly states that there will be no state religion, supports the free expression of religion, and prohibits discrimination on the basis of religious belief. In reality, political life reflects a more complicated engagement with religious identity that varies by religion, ethnicity, and region.

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[private-jets/#41781716a2a3](#), accessed October 3, 2013.

<sup>31</sup> Tomas Sundes Dronen, *Pentecostalism, Globalisation, and Islam in Northern Cameroon: Megachurches in the Making?* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), p. 46; Norimitsu Onishi, “Africans Fill Churches That Celebrate Wealth,” *The New York Times*, March 13, 2002, <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/03/13/world/africans-fill-churches-that-celebrate-wealth.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed October 3, 2013.

<sup>32</sup> “Nigerian minister claims \$6.8bn of public funds stolen in seven years,” *The Guardian*, January 18, 2016, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jan/19/nigerian-minister-claims-68bn-of-public-funds-stolen-in-seven-years>, accessed 12 February 2016.

<sup>33</sup> “Leaking Revenue: How a Big Tax Break to European Gas Companies has Cost Nigeria Billions,” *Action Aid*, January 20, 2016, <https://www.actionaid.org.uk/sites/default/files/publications/leakingrevenue.pdf>, accessed 12 February 2016.

For example, there are complaints on the part of [Muslims](#) and [Christians](#) alike that political leaders show favoritism toward citizens and groups that share their religion, and stoke sectarian violence when it suits their purposes. On one hand, many Nigerians sense that their religious group is underrepresented or unfairly excluded from the political realm on the local, state, or national level, though the election of Buhari may have altered this feeling. On the other hand, Christians in the South express fears that the army and defense positions are dominated by northern Muslims.

There are also concerns over the relationship between politicians and the religious experts they often patronize in order to gain access to political power. It is widely known that some politicians across political parties enlist the services of religious experts (sometimes from two or three traditions at the same time) to ensure victory in elections, or to consolidate power. Apart from some of the ethical issues raised by some of these activities and the way they are reported and/or perceived, there is concern over the potential subservience of political leaders to these religious experts.

Finally, the constitution also permits individual states and regions to utilize common law (including religious law) in local courts, and thus legislative processes differ across Nigeria's thirty-six states and Federal Capital Territory. State governors and state legislatures enjoy significant autonomy in decision-making, and the 1999 constitution allows permits to establish courts based on common or customary law systems.

Consequently, Nigeria's constituent states have been allowed to institute [Islamic law](#) (*shari'a*) as the basis of local civil and court procedures. In 1999–2000, with Muslim politicians leading the effort and garnering support from a populace disappointed with corruption in the national legal system, all twelve northern states elected to do so. Some Islamist groups, including [Boko Haram](#), view Islamic law as the sole legitimate source of political authority.<sup>34</sup> However, the adoption and practice of Islamic law has received a mixed response among Muslims, with some preferring the status quo before its adoption.

## Relations with Other Nation-States

Northern Nigeria and northern **Cameroon** share a border that in the past two decades has been a site of increasing conflict, particularly due to militant Islamism among members of [Boko Haram](#) and disputes over the oil rich area known as the Bakassi Peninsula. These issues are tied to the drying of Lake Chad due to climate change; locals who once relied on Lake Chad's ecosystem now compete over limited resources in the context of widespread poverty and political instability.<sup>35</sup> The border dispute between Nigeria and Cameroon was decided by the International Court of Justice in 2002, referred to as the Greentree Agreement, at which point Nigeria agreed to

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<sup>34</sup> John Campbell, "Religion and Security in Nigeria," in *The Routledge Handbook of Religion and Security*, eds. Chris Seiple et al. (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 215–225.

<sup>35</sup> Abiodun Alao, *Natural Resources and Conflict in Africa: The Tragedy of Endowment* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2007).

transfer land to Cameroon and Nigerian troops were withdrawn from the Peninsula. The agreement was reaffirmed in 2013.<sup>36</sup>

Diplomatic relations between **China** and Nigeria became closer in the 1990s during the [Sani Abacha](#) regime, when the United States imposed certain economic and diplomatic sanctions on Nigeria. Currently, Nigeria is China's third largest African trading partner behind [Egypt](#) and South Africa.<sup>37</sup> China is also a large and important market for Nigerian oil and is heavily invested in Nigerian oil production, which has included supplying military assistance to combat anti-corporate militant activism in Nigeria's Delta region.<sup>38</sup> While some perceive Chinese interest in Africa as a new type of "scramble for Africa," as it often has a negative impact on local communities and businesses through environmental degradation and economic exploitation, for some China presents an alternative to what is perceived as Western exploitation, neglect, and neo-colonialism.

**The United States** relies heavily on Nigerian oil, though the recent North American shale oil boom is decreasing demand, much to the chagrin of Nigerian business and political leaders. The United States has been involved with anti-terrorism efforts in Nigeria since the 9/11 attacks by Islamist militant group al-Qaeda.<sup>39</sup>

During the Abacha regime in the 1990s, American President Bill Clinton imposed various sanctions on Nigeria in protest of human rights violations against government opposition, particularly the execution of [Ken Saro-Wiwa](#). However, Clinton did not introduce oil sanctions, which was suggestive of the importance of Nigerian oil imports during that period. Human rights groups criticized Clinton's decision, stating that oil sanctions would have swiftly ended the Abacha regime.

Lastly, Nigerian immigration to America is currently altering America's religious landscape as Nigerian [Catholic](#) priests become more prominent in American church leadership, and Nigerian Pentecostal movements flourish. The United States has a large Nigerian population with roots in transatlantic slavery as well as in more recent immigration waves. In particular, the rise of military dictatorships triggered a massive immigration, especially among educated Nigerians, doubling the Nigerian American population between 1989 and 1990.<sup>40</sup> At the same time the difficult economic

<sup>36</sup> Piet Konings, "Settling Border Conflicts in Africa Peacefully: Lessons Learned from the Bakassi Dispute between Cameroon and Nigeria," in *Land, Law and Politics in Africa: Mediating Conflict and Reshaping the State*, ed. Jan Abbink, Jon Abbink, and Mirjam de Bruijn (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 191–211.

<sup>37</sup> John E. Anegbode and Cletus E. Onakalu, "How Ready is Nigeria for Chinese Investments?" in *The Political Economy of Development and Underdevelopment in Africa*, eds. Toyin Falola and Jessica Achberger (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 267–278.

<sup>38</sup> Dino Mahtani, "Nigeria turns to China for defence aid," *Financial Times*, February 28, 2006, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/ef8dbc30-a7c6-11da-85bc-0000779e2340.html>, accessed October 25, 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Olayiwola Abegunrin, *Nigerian Foreign Policy Under Military Rule, 1966–1999* (Westport: Praeger Publishing, 2003), p. 153.

<sup>40</sup> Jeanne Armstrong, "Global Origins: Africa, Asia, and Europe," in *Immigration in America Today: An Encyclopedia*, eds. James Loucky, Jeanne Armstrong, and Lawrence J. Estrada (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), pp. 149.

climate, particularly following the ballooning inflation after the controversial World Bank/IMF Structural Adjustment Programs launched in the '80s, many highly (and often foreign) educated Nigerians left the country in search of better employment, causing a type of brain-drain. In the past decade, most African immigrants to the United States have been from Nigeria, which has had a direct impact on America's religious composition. Nigerian [Pentecostal](#) churches such as the Redeemed Christian Church of God are growing in American cities, and Nigerian priests frequently lead Catholic congregations as numbers of American priests dwindle and enrolment in Nigerian seminaries grows.<sup>41</sup>

President Buhari was invited to the White House in July 2015, shortly after his election. The invitation is a show of interest and support for the country's new leader by the United States. The United States has also pledged \$5 million toward the efforts of the multinational joint force combating Boko Haram, in addition to the \$34 million that has already been contributed to regional efforts in Nigeria.<sup>42</sup>

## Case Study: Religion & Public Health

Faiths United for Health is an interfaith initiative to combat malaria in Africa, which was launched by the Center for Interfaith Action on Global Poverty (CIFA), in collaboration with the Nigerian Inter-Faith Action Association (NIFAA) and with the support of several international NGOs. Although the project has pan-African goals, it initially focused on Nigeria, where malaria had been a particular problem, accounting for one quarter of malaria deaths in Africa.<sup>43</sup>

Faiths United for Health was publicly launched at a press conference in Abuja on December 10, 2009, but represents the confluence of national and international initiatives dedicated to combating pandemic diseases in Africa.<sup>44</sup> In 2008, the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Ban Ki-Moon, set an ambitious goal for the international community: to provide insecticide-treated bed nets for every bed in Africa by the end of 2010 and eliminate malaria-related deaths by 2015.<sup>45</sup> In an effort to achieve this goal, CIFA and the UN Special Envoy on Malaria launched the One World Against Malaria

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Rice, "Mission from Africa," *The New York Times*, April 12, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/12/magazine/12churches-t.html>, accessed February 26, 2016; John Soltes, "From Nigeria to America, in Search of God," *The Brooklyn Rail*, December 14, 2007, <http://www.brooklynrail.org/2007/12/local/from-nigeria-to-america-in-search-of-god>, accessed October 25, 2013.

<sup>42</sup> "Hope for a new chapter in U.S.- Nigeria relations," *The Washington Post*, July 23, 2015, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hopeful-signs-from-nigeria/2015/07/23/07278892-3086-11e5-97ae-30a30cca95d7\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/hopeful-signs-from-nigeria/2015/07/23/07278892-3086-11e5-97ae-30a30cca95d7_story.html), accessed 12 February, 2016.

<sup>43</sup> "Stopping a Killer: Preventing Malaria in Our Communities (Christian)—CIFA," *Religions for Peace International*, n.d., <http://religionsforpeaceinternational.org/publications/stopping-killer-preventing-malaria-our-communities-christian-cifa>, accessed 6 November 2013; "Malaria—Osoimehin, Religious Leaders Advocate Cooperation", *This Day*, 13 May 2009, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200905140079.html>, accessed 6 November 2013.

<sup>44</sup> "Stopping a Killer: Preventing Malaria in Our Communities (Christian)—CIFA."

<sup>45</sup> Max Amuchie, "Global Action Against Malaria," *Business Day*, May 10, 2009, <http://businessdayonline.com/2009/05/global-action-against-malaria-and-the-interfaith-perspective/>, accessed 6 November 2013.

Campaign at a May 2009 summit in Washington, DC.<sup>46</sup> The summit marked the launch of a unique approach to malaria, which emphasized the role that faith communities and faith-based organizations could play in battling the disease. At the summit, the Archbishop of Abuja, John Onaiyekan, and the Sultan of Sokoto, Mohammed Sa'ad Abubakar III announced the formation of the Nigerian Inter-Faith Action Association, which had already garnered local attention in Nigeria and a promise of \$2 million in funding from the Nigerian National Malaria Control Programme.<sup>47</sup> At the Summit, CIFA and the Tony Blair Faith Foundation also announced a joint initiative to help other sub-Saharan countries develop similar interfaith action associations.<sup>48</sup>

Faiths United for Health is an outgrowth of the summit and the result of collaboration between faith-based organizations, international NGOs, and the local government. The collaborative nature of Faiths United for Health and the international interest in the project was apparent at the 2009 Abuja press conference where the program was launched. In addition to the leaders of NIFAA, the Sultan of Sokoto and the President of the Christian Association of Nigeria, the press conference was also hosted by the Nigerian Minister of Health, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Malaria, the World Bank Country Director, and the Methodist Prelate of Nigeria.<sup>49</sup>

The number of participants in the press conference also hints at the ambitious nature of the project, which requires support at many levels and \$1 billion in funding.<sup>50</sup> At the initial launch of the program, CIFA and NIFAA trained 100 Nigerian faith leaders in malaria prevention and education, who were each charged with training another cohort of leaders. In this way, FUH organizers hoped to engage a network of 300,000 faith leaders in the fight against malaria.<sup>51</sup>

Despite initial international interest and a large funding network, however, it is unclear whether the program has been successful. Jay Winston, the Associate Dean of the Harvard School of Public Health has noted that anti-malaria campaigns first have to overcome local perceptions about malaria, such as the assumption that it is caused by too much sun rather than by mosquito bites, and the complacency that has developed from living in an endemic area for decades. It is also notable that FUH's efforts have only focused on Muslim and Christian communities, and have not included resources for leaders of

<sup>46</sup> Sam Hiersteiner, "Nigerian Faith Leaders Launch Campaign Against Malaria," in *Presbyterian Church USA*, December 10, 2009, <https://www.pcusa.org/news/2009/12/10/nigerian-faith-leaders-launch-campaign-against-mal/>, accessed 6 November 2013; "Daily Press Briefing by Offices of Spokesperson for Secretary General", *US Fed News*, 25 April 2009, <https://www.highbeam.com/doc/1G1-215188715.html>, accessed 6 November, 2013.

<sup>47</sup> Amuchie, "Global Action Against Malaria."

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Hiersteiner, "Nigerian Faith Leaders Launch Campaign Against Malaria."

<sup>50</sup> Aaron J. Leichman, "Nigeria's Religious Leaders Launch \$1B Effort to Tackle Malaria," *The Christian Post*, 11 December 2009, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/nigeria-religious-leaders-launch-1b-effort-to-tackle-malaria-42233/>, accessed November 6, 2013.

<sup>51</sup> Hiersteiner, "Nigerian Faith Leaders Launch Campaign Against Malaria"; Jay Winsten, "The Sultan and the Archbishop: Joining Hands, Saving Lives," *The Huffington Post*, 9 December 2009, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-winsten/the-sultan-and-the-archbi\\_b\\_386381.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jay-winsten/the-sultan-and-the-archbi_b_386381.html), accessed November 6, 2013.

indigenous religions.<sup>52</sup> The resources FUH has developed also fail to take into account any internal diversity within Christianity and Islam. The “sermon starters” provided in FUH materials are presented as universally applicable within a given religion, although it is entirely possible that a Pentecostal sermon might require a different approach than an Anglican one. Although an analysis of the effectiveness of FUH is unavailable as of this writing, NIFAA continues to work on the ground to engage faith leaders in the fight against malaria.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> "Faiths United for Health: A Toolkit for Faith Leaders in Nigeria in the Fight Against Malaria," Pamphlet, Nigerian Inter-Faith Action Association, n.d.

<sup>53</sup> "World Malaria Day—UN Calls for More Efforts to Curb Deaths," *Vanguard*, 26 April 2013, <http://www.vanguardngr.com/2013/04/world-malaria-day-un-calls-for-more-efforts-to-curb-deaths/>, accessed November 6, 2013.

## Case Study: Interfaith Peacebuilding

Between February and May 2004, over 700 people were killed, and 45,000 displaced, in conflicts between Christians and Muslims in and around the town of Yelwa in the Shendam local government area of Plateau State.<sup>54</sup> The crisis in Yelwa sparked violent riots elsewhere in the region, ultimately leading the government to declare a state of emergency in Plateau State in spring 2004.<sup>55</sup> During the state of emergency, the interim administrator, retired General Chris Alli, launched an ambitious six-month peacemaking initiative, which culminated in the signing of a peace agreement negotiated by Imam Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye in November 2004.

Administrator Alli's peacemaking initiative, known as the Plateau Peace Program, included plans for dialogue among religious and community leaders, a statewide peace conference, and a truth and reconciliation commission.<sup>56</sup> The peace conference convened in August 2004, with the purpose of reviewing causes of the conflict that had been submitted by the community and proposing solutions to the government. The resolutions it produced, however, consisted primarily of policy recommendations for the national and state governments and seemed to favor Christian groups.<sup>57</sup>

During July 2004, the Interfaith Mediation Centre spent at least twelve days working on a variety of peacemaking projects in Plateau State, which took a very different approach. These included a five-day, faith-based workshop for youths in Jos. The workshop drew 100 participants from each of the local government areas of Plateau State and provided training in mediation and reconciliation. Perhaps more significantly, the Interfaith Mediation Centre also convened a three-day interfaith workshop for forty women and fifty community/religious leaders from Yelwa, which addressed both conflict resolution and trauma counseling. As a result of this meeting, participants created an Inter-Faith Group for the Shendam local government area, tasked with sustaining peace in the area by working with both governmental and non-governmental organizations.<sup>58</sup>

In November 2004, Administrator Alli invited Wuye and Ashafa to help address ongoing tensions between Christians and Muslims in Yelwa.<sup>59</sup> Wuye and Ashafa brought together leaders from the local Christian and Muslim communities for a five-day meeting, during which they combined

<sup>54</sup> Uthman Abubakar, "Yelwan Shendam—Five Years After," *Daily Trust*, 3 July 2009, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200907030151.html>, accessed November 6, 2013.

<sup>55</sup> Lami Sadiq, "Yelwa-Shendam—Rising from Ashes, Nine Years After Bloodbath," *Daily Trust*, 7 September 2013, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201309070163.html>, accessed November 6, 2013.

<sup>56</sup> "Revenge in the Name of Religion: The Cycle of Violence in Plateau and Kano States," *Human Rights Watch*, 2005, p. 49–51.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 50–51; According to the U.S. Institute of Peace, the Muslim community rejected the proposals. "Conflict in Plateau State," *United States Institute of Peace: Certificate Course in Interreligious Conflict Resolution*.

<sup>58</sup> Jibril Daudu, "Muslim-Christian Groups Parley for Peace in Plateau," *Daily Trust*, 7 July 2005, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200507070551.html>, November 2, 2013.

<sup>59</sup> David R. Smock, "Mediating Between Christians and Muslims in Plateau State, Nigeria", *Peaceworks*, Vol. 17, No. 55 (2006).

Western conflict resolution techniques with religious preaching. Although the meeting was initially confrontational, by the third day the participants were able to agree on some of the core causes of the conflict, including Christian accusations that Muslim non-[indigenes](#) failed to respect local leaders and traditions. In a surprising turn of events, the Muslim leaders not only accepted the accusations of the Christian participants, but agreed that the behavior of local Muslim groups needed to change, made a formal apology, and requested forgiveness.<sup>60</sup>

Astonished by the Muslims' actions, the Christians also requested forgiveness for their part in the violent conflict. On the last day of the meeting, participants in the negotiation formulated a peace agreement which recognized and strove to address several of the underlying causes of ongoing conflict. In contrast to the government-oriented perspective of the August peace conference resolutions, the Yelwa Peace Agreement focused on local concerns and made recommendations for actions that could be implemented by local leaders and community members. Among other statements, those who signed the Peace Agreement affirmed the need to refer to His Royal Highness the Long Goemai of Shendam by his formal title and grant him respect, condemned the use of derogatory language to refer to groups and locations, and pledged to avoid using the media to spread incorrect information or inflammatory messages.<sup>61</sup> On February 19, 2005, Yelwa held a gathering to celebrate the peace agreement. Several thousand people attended the celebration, including many people who had felt compelled to leave their homes when violence broke out the previous year.<sup>62</sup>

As of September 2013, Yelwa remained peaceful, despite a lack of governmental aid in the years after the crisis and ongoing conflicts in the surrounding areas.<sup>63</sup> A group of individuals known as the Inter-Faith Peace Committee, which may be the same as or evolved from the Inter-Faith Group formed in 2004, has played a key role in maintaining the peace. Along with organizing ongoing dialogues and events, the Inter-Faith Peace Committee also oversees a peace vigilante group, which includes Muslim and Christian youths from the area who monitor the town to help prevent small crimes and diffuse potential conflicts.<sup>64</sup>

What is notable about the successful peace-keeping initiatives in Yelwa is the grassroots nature of the work and the local focus. While the government's programs worked with state leaders and representatives from religious umbrella groups, the work of Ashafa and Wuye in 2004 and that of the Inter-Faith Peace Committee more recently focused on local actors and issues. By grounding their work in the religious, psychological, and social needs of the local community, Ashafa and Wuye seem to have created a foundation for the Yelwa community to continue the work of maintaining peace on their own.

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid., p. 18–19 .

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>63</sup> Sadiq, "Yelwa-Shendam—Rising from Ashes;" Nasir Imam, "Yelwa: Stock Taking a Year After," *Daily Trust*, 27 June 2005, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200506271343.html>, accessed November 2, 2013; Abubakar, "Yelwan Shendam."

<sup>64</sup> Sadiq, "Yelwa-Shendam—Rising from Ashes."