



Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies

Non-Boko Haram violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria

Nigeria Conflict Security Analysis Network (NCSAN)



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Picture taken by one of the Authors in Mpape, one of the local settlements around Abuja in November 2014. It shows a Muslim Fulani herdsman moving through the town with his herds and a machete under his arm. (Source: NCSAN)

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Disclaimers

Hausa-Fulani Muslim Herdsmen: Throughout the research, the phrase Hausa-Fulani Muslim Herdsmen is used to designate those responsible for the attacks against indigenous Christian communities in the Middle Belt region. However, the study is fully aware that in most reports across northern Nigeria, Muslim-Fulani herdsmen or Fulani herdsmen is also in use. The choice of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim Herdsmen is to accommodate the controversy regarding the identity of those allegedly involved in the attacks, in both formal and informal reports. However, it is not intended to target one particular socio-religious or ethnic group

Names not published for security reasons: For security reasons, the names of those interviewed cannot be published in this report. The interviews were conducted with different categories of people considered as “victims” or “witnesses” in all the states under consideration. There was no distinction in gender, class, religion, ethnicity or political affiliation. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview those considered as “perpetrators” either suspected, arrested or in custody to hear their own side of the story.

Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Disclaimers	2
Abstract: The danger of a single story	4
Introduction.....	4
The purpose of the study	4
Limitations of the study	5
Methodology	5
Chapter One: Conceptual and theoretical frameworks for understanding non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria.....	6
Divided societies	6
Migration.....	7
Violent conflict	8
Chapter Two: The Middle Belt region and Boko Haram and non-Boko Haram violent conflict, a brief history of northern Nigeria	10
The case for non-Boko Haram violent conflict.....	12
Chapter Three: The trend of non-Boko Haram violence since 2011, Christians as victims	14
Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in other northern states	14
Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria	15
KADUNA STATE: Context.....	15
Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in southern Kaduna	16
BENUE STATE: Context.....	19
Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in Benue state	19
TARABA STATE: Context.....	22
Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in Taraba state.....	23
NASARAWA STATE: Context.....	26
Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in Nasarawa State	26
Far reaching implications for the states concerned.....	28
Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen attacks on indigenous Christian communities	30
Reported cases in 2011.....	30
Reported cases in 2012.....	32
Reported cases in 2013.....	32
Reported cases in 2014 (till March).....	34
Chapter Four: Understanding the non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region.....	36
Ongoing discourse in Nigeria: Environment, migration and economic competition	36
<i>Darul Islam</i> and the quest to dominate the Middle Belt region in Nigeria’s political history.....	37
Under the shadow of Boko Haram, <i>darul Islam</i> and non-Boko Haram violence	41
Concluding remarks	43
Number of people interviewed in different states	45
References.....	46

Abstract: The danger of a single story

Under the shadow of Boko Haram, a vicious circle of violence in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria perpetrated by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen has led to the deaths of thousands of Christians, with hundreds of churches targeted or destroyed. Unfortunately, the narrative of this particular conflict has been reduced to a single story: **environmental degradation and migration**. The danger of this single story is that it gradually becomes the only story. It is not that it is untrue, but it is incomplete, robbing the conflict of the dignity of being analyzed from all perspectives. Extensive field research in northern Nigeria has revealed that though environmental degradation might have played a part, the conflict appears to be inspired by Islamic religious propaganda to dominate Christian territories and bring them under the *darul Islam* (house of Islam). The goal of this research is to examine this particular conflict titled *Migration and Violent Conflict in Divided Societies: Non-Boko Haram violence against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria*.

Introduction

In the past few years there has been a remarkable rebirth of interest in the issue of migration by policymakers and scholars [1]. This interest has been linked to two very significant themes, first, that humans, by nature, are designed to be mobile. They move, as the need arises, from one location to another in search of a variety of things [2]. Second, the interest has undoubtedly been triggered by a striking increase in remittance flows. Remittances sent back to developing countries rose from \$31.1 billion in 1990 to \$76.8 billion in 2000 to \$167.0 billion in 2005 [3]. There is a growing belief that remittances are a more effective instrument for income redistribution, and poverty reduction, than large, bureaucratic development programs [4]. Most significantly, this mobility has been linked to different forms of conflict between migrants and host communities. Evidence suggests that while host communities may demand complete integration, migrant communities are prone to maintaining their cultural and religious identities, sometimes with disregard to the historical and cultural sensitivities of the host communities. This has for years led to conflict and violence in different societies around the world. This study, therefore, examines the on-going violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. It argues that despite the increase in internal migration due to environmental degradation, migration itself may not be the immediate cause of the conflict. The Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen who are the direct perpetrators of such violent conflict take advantage of the fertile conflict environment created by the Boko Haram conflict to launch attacks against Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria with the purpose of conquering the territory.

The purpose of the study

Since 2009, most conflicts in northern Nigeria have been linked to Boko Haram's violent uprising. There has not been adequate research to distinguish Boko Haram violence from other forms of violence in northern Nigeria. The purpose of this research is first to make a distinction between Boko Haram and non-Boko Haram violence in northern Nigeria. Second, to examine non-Boko Haram violence as being beyond the issue of environmental degradation and migration to include the Islamic policy of domination. Based on recent field investigations, the research explains the perpetrators, actors and frameworks, analysing why Christians have

become victims of this type of violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. The choice of this topic is influenced by the fact that, first, the Middle Belt region remains one of the most divided regions, religiously and ethnically. The return to multiparty democracy in 1999 not only increased ethnic consciousness but also triggered the declaration of Sharia law in northern Nigeria and the dispute over whether territory belonged to Christians or Muslims in the Middle Belt region. The level of internal migration appears to be a new strategy to dominate Christian territories.

Limitations of the study

It is necessary to concede that the purpose of this research is not to contest established facts regarding the nature of violent activities on-going in northern Nigeria. Again, the research is cognizant of other conflicts primarily related to inter-ethnic rivalry which are outside the scope of this investigation, such as the conflict between the Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups in Taraba state, and the Eggon and Tiv ethnic groups in Nasarawa state. Again, information collected in the course of this research is directly from victims and perpetrators on the ground, which may not agree with the perceptions of official sectors in Nigeria. However, it is a platform to broaden the horizon of discussions with a contextual analysis of non-Boko Haram violent activities in the Middle Belt region and why Christian communities are the victims.

Methodology

The qualitative method is used for this particular research. This includes historical, descriptive and analytical approaches based on gathered evidence. The primary source for this research is based on field investigations conducted between January and June 2014 looking at issues of the environment, internal migration and conflict in the northern region of Nigeria. Among other things, the data collection process includes semi-structured interviews with individuals taking refuge in private houses and refugee camps across Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states. The research also uses historical documents from the national archives, relying on previous research conducted on issues of the environment and desert encroachment, in addition to documentary data taken from newspaper accounts, diaries, letters and verbal reports.

The research is divided into four chapters. Chapter one examines the conceptual and theoretical framework that underscores the notion of migration, violent conflict and divided societies as it relates to northern Nigeria. Chapter two is a descriptive and historical presentation of the Middle Belt region, making a case for non-Boko Haram violent conflict. Chapter three presents the nature of this violent conflict in the Middle Belt region. It gives a graphic presentation of the conflict in southern Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nasawara states. The final examines the ongoing discourse linking the conflict to environmental degradation and migration, but suggests that ultimately it is about the expansionist Islamic policy of trying to dominate the Middle Belt region, a Christian territory and that is why Christians are mostly the victims.

Chapter One: Conceptual and theoretical frameworks for understanding non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria

In order to understand the nature of the on-going non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria and how it impacts on indigenous Christian farming communities, it is important to make some conceptual clarifications. The clarification of the concepts *divided societies*, *migration* and *violent conflict* helps to outline the theoretical frameworks within which the conflict is being interpreted, provide the day-to-day perspectives that accompany the discourse on this violent conflict, as well as the narratives used in the ideological justification, especially as it relates to the security situation generally.

Divided societies

Sammy and Theodor argue that divided societies are societies 'different in culture, separate in institutions, unequal in power and privilege, or disagreeing on fundamental issues' [5]. Furthermore, these divisions influence the extent to which the distribution of a nation's resources to her citizens, are coordinated. Yiftachel makes a distinction between pluralistic societies and deeply divided societies. Pluralistic societies, he argues are 'composed of immigrant groups which tend to assimilate over time and are usually governed by liberal democratic regimes' [6]. In such societies, one's ethnic affiliation is a private matter, and ethnic movements mainly focus on the attainment of civil and economic equality. On the other hand, deeply divided societies are societies that are composed of non-assimilating ethnic groups and occupy their historical (real or mythical), homeland [7]. Thus, such societies tend to promote goals of cultural and regional autonomy. Again, within these societies, ethnic conflicts are potentially more explosive [8]. African societies are seen as primordially multi-ethnic, with populations sharply divided along racial, cultural, linguistic and religious lines. Most are composed of different traditional societies, each with distinctive institutions [9]. Additionally, colonial administrations were accused of enacting policies in gross disregard, often in ignorance, of indigenous institutions, further dividing the people [10]. However, what is of concern here is how these legacies continue to generate violent conflict, on the basis of religion, ethnicity and region, particularly in Nigeria.

Consequently, Hanaa Motasim identifies some characteristics of a deeply divided society. First, the society is divided into majority and minority groups, in population and influence. Second, the majority enacts regulations with the aim of maintaining existing patterns of socio-political and economic domination [11]. Finally, the majority tries to retard the minority's development and excludes them from centers of power and influence [12]. Other qualities of a deeply divided society will include absentee or weakened opposition, historical and rebellious enemies [13]. At the moment, most African countries remain severely divided, and ethnic divisions have proved a major impediment to the attainment of stable democracy all over the continent [14]. Kofi Annan, in his report to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) titled: 'The causes of conflict and the promotion of durable peace and sustainable development in Africa,' noted that, '...14 of the continent's 53 countries were afflicted by armed conflicts in 1996 alone, and over 30 wars have occurred...since 1970' [15] and mostly within the states. What this means is that as African states evolve into political nations, there is more

contestation over space, land and resources, due to ethno-regional and religious division. Since 1999, Nigeria has been engulfed in violent conflict of this nature.

Migration

Evidence within the migration literature suggests that the concept of migration is not an easy one to define. There is, however, a convergence of opinion that migration usually involves the permanent or semi-permanent change in residence that begins in an area of origin and ends at an area of destination [16]. The duration of this new settlement as well as the reasons vary [17]. The *Human Migration Guide* identifies various forms of migration:

- internal migration, movement to a new place within the same state, country or nation;
- external migration, movement to a new home or place outside the state, country or nation;
- emigration/immigration, leaving one country to move to another;
- population transfer, which occurs when a government forces a large group of people out of a region, usually based on ethnicity or religion, also known as involuntary or forced migration;
- impelled migration (also called ‘reluctant’ or ‘imposed’ migration), individuals are not forced out of their country, but leave because of unfavorable situations such as warfare, political problems, or religious persecution;
- step migration, a series of shorter, less extreme migrations from a person’s place of origin to final destination, such as moving from a farm, to a village, to a town, and finally to a city; and
- chain migration, a series of migrations within a family or defined group of people. A chain migration often begins with one family member who sends money to bring other family members to the new location, often resulting in the clustering of people from a specific region into certain neighborhoods or small towns [18].

Barret argues that there may be both *push* and *pull* factors that determine the nature, place and duration of migration [19]. For example, push factors may include unemployment, war, and environmental disaster while pull factors include availability of jobs, educational opportunities and sometimes the nearness of friends and relatives [20]. Labo, for example, contended that ‘migrants tend to get attracted to areas with significant development indicators of economic prosperity’ [21]. There have been a lot of debates questioning the push–pull factors as determinants of migration [22]. Zelingsky’s new framework of transitional migration theory identifies five phases of the vital transition: the pre-modern traditional society, the early transitional society, the late transitional society, the advanced society and finally the future ‘super-advanced’. The point of his argument is that each of these phases defines the type of migration that takes place [23]. However, whatever these debates may be, one thing is certain, migration has contributed to the richness in diversity of cultures, ethnicities and races in developed countries. In addition, individuals who migrate experience multiple stresses that can impact their mental wellbeing, including the loss of cultural norms, religious customs, and social support systems, adjustment to a new culture and changes in identity and concept of self [24]. The concern in this investigation is to determine how internal migration is linked to the non-Boko Haram violent conflict and its impact on Christians.

Violent conflict

To understand what violent conflict is, it is important to also understand the meaning of 'conflict' as a concept. According to Rummel, conflict could be seen as a social phenomenon that emerges in the context of human relations: relationships to authority, political space, land, and economic and material resources [25]. In this context, conflict emerges when two or more parties perceive that their interests are incompatible, express hostile attitudes or pursue their interests through actions that damage the other parties' interests. These parties may be individuals, groups or countries [26]. As such, interests can be perceived in various ways. First, there is interest in resources, which include territory, money, energy sources, food and how they should be distributed. Second, there is interest in power and how control and participation in political decision-making processes are allocated. Third, there is interest in identity, concerning cultural, social and political communities to which people are tied. Fourth, there is interest in status, whether people believe they are treated with respect and dignity and whether their traditions and social positions are respected, undermined or threatened with extinction. Finally, there is interest over values, particularly those embodied in systems of government, religion and ideology [27].

Consequently, violent conflict occurs when parties seek to attain their goals by violent means and try to dominate or destroy the opposing parties' ability to pursue their own interests [28]. Yet, it is safe to suggest that violence does not always occur, even when interests differ. Violence is not inevitable but is contingent upon the presence or absence of certain conditions. First, the interests at stake – natural resource competition, government control, territorial control, governing ideologies. Second, the parties involved – ethnic, religious or regional communities, states, political factions. Third, the types of force or coercion used – nuclear war, conventional war, terrorism, coups, repression, genocide, gross human rights violations, ethnic cleansing. Finally, the geographic scope or arena for killing and destruction – international conflicts, inter-communal conflicts, state-sponsored terrorism and border disputes [29]. It is necessary to argue that violent conflicts have many dimensions and exhibit several variations simultaneously; features may fluctuate in importance over the course of a conflict.

In this context, the non-Boko Haram violent conflict is understood as a conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, intrinsically inspired by the radical Islamic ideology both as purported by the expansionist principle of *darul Islam* (house of Islam and the obligation to bring non-Muslims under its rule) and invariably by Boko Haram. Furthermore, it is a long-standing contestation over the religious, political and ethno-regional domination of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria motivated by the indigene settler ideology. It is an ideology that pitches the indigenes of a place against the settlers in the face of intense competition over religious domination, political power, economic resources and social services. The indigenes are seen as those who perceive themselves to have common ethnic origin, with historical memories and traditional ties to the land they occupy. On the other hand, settlers are the migrant communities who sometimes insist on maintaining their cultural and religious identities, with the aspiration not only to disregard the historical and cultural sensitivities of the host communities but to eventually dominate them. The question therefore is, how is the on-going non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria to be understood? How is

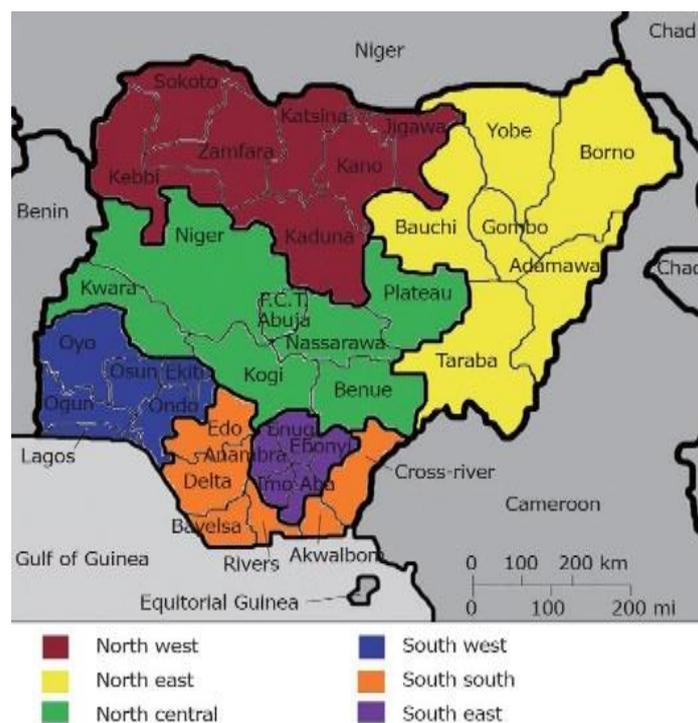
it interpreted knowing that it seems to occur simultaneously with the terrorist activities of Boko Haram?

Chapter Two: The Middle Belt region and Boko Haram and non-Boko Haram violent conflict, a brief history of northern Nigeria

The history of northern Nigeria is complex and can be confusing. Nigerians frequently use the term the 'North' to designate the old Northern Region, inherited from colonial powers until the creation of new states in 1967 [30]. Thus, Nigeria's '*One Northern*' myth is related to the Premiership of Sr. Ahmadu Bello who, on the eve of Nigeria's independence, attempted to weld together a political community in the northern part of Nigeria to confront other regions for power sharing agreements [31]. The first of these components was the Sokoto Caliphate, which includes the emirate provinces of Adamawa, Bauchi, Bida, Ilorin, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto and Zaria. The second component was the Borno province and third was the Middle Belt provinces of Kabba, Plateau and Benue [32]. He referred to the northern citizens as 'Jama'ar Arewa' [33], meaning a trans-ethnic community of the North.

The Middle Belt region, according to Ishaku, 'connotes the mid-lands between the southern and northern part of the country' [34]. Providing further demarcations on what constitutes the geographical middle belt, Ballard says that 'the middle belt is the area roughly inscribed by the Hausa-speaking area to the north, and the Yoruba, Edo and Ibo-speaking areas to the south' [35]. With this apparent delineation of the Middle Belt region, Shilgba goes on to name the territorial states to include Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba, Adamawa, Plateau, Southern Kebbi, Kogi, Kwara Niger, Southern Kaduna, FCT, Southern Gombe, and two minority local governments areas of Tafawa Balewa and Bogoro in southern Bauchi state. However, the fear of the majority dominance and the politics that surrounded oil revenue allocations forced the late General Sani Abacha, Nigeria's foremost military dictator, to divide the country into six geopolitical zones in 1995 [36]. The southern region comprises the South-West, South-South and South-East. The three northern geopolitical zones are the North-West, North-East and North-Central. In North-Central there are six states in addition to the Federal Capital Territory-Abuja, Benue, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger and Plateau states.

Geopolitical Map of Nigeria:



Source: Google Maps

Current controversies in Nigeria's political discourse are about the political and ideological understanding of the difference between the North-Central zone and the Middle Belt region. While the North-Central zone is perceived as a political division, the Middle Belt region is more or less an ideological conception. It is 'an anti-feudal political tendency directed against what has been coined the Hausa-Fulani oligarchy' [37]. More importantly, it is a 'vehicle for political mobilization and a rallying point in the struggle for identity and political participation' by Christian minorities of Lord Lugard's northern Nigeria [38]. Sklar is therefore right to have posited that 'the Middle Belt area comprises of people who were either non-Hausa speaking, non-Muslim or both' [39]. The Middle Belt became a category, activating non-Muslim and non-Hausa-Fulani consciousness against *northernization* perceived as a ploy to Islamize the Christians and other non-Muslim groups of the North, while keeping ethnic minorities marginalized in the socio-political development of Nigeria.

Obviously, this definition of the Middle Belt region remains very contentious. For example, if viewed from the perspective of self-emancipation of non-Muslim and non-Hausa-Fulani ethnic minorities in the north, then the geographical definition negates the non-Muslim and non-Hausa-Fulani minorities in northern states of Borno, Jigawa, Kano and Katsina. They are not captured by the geographical definition, yet they share in the religious quest of rejecting the Islamic hegemony over northern Nigeria. Another point deserving attention is that the ideological/political definition of the Middle Belt excludes those who live in the region geographically, but whose political sympathy is with those from elsewhere. For instance, some emirates in Niger state such as Bida, Kontagora and Lapai emirates, although they belong to the Middle Belt territorially, they will identify with the religious aspirations of Islam symbolized in the Caliphate in Sokoto. This is because they act as 'traditional and religious' leaders of the

Muslims in their emirates. In the same way, the Yoruba in Kogi whose ambition will win the sympathy of the South-West is likely to identify with that region politically rather than with the Middle Belt [40]. Whatever the contentions, one thing is obvious, the beginning of the Middle Belt region is seen as the mid-lands between the southern and northern part of the country, with indigenous ethnic groups that pre-date colonial experience in the sub-region. However, the activities and legacies of both the colonial masters and the Muslim Hausa-Fulani imperialists brought the Middle Belt region to be what Dan-Suliman, quoted by Ibrahim, describes as a 'grossly marginalized region with an endangered species on the brink of extinction and cultural annihilation' [41]. Thus for Dan-Suliman, the legacies of both the colonial administration and Muslim Hausa-Fulani imperialists, especially during the period of decolonization in the 1950s, marginalized the indigenous ethnic groups of the Middle Belt region who are mostly Christians and worshippers of the African Traditional Religion (ATR). Violent conflict in the Middle Belt region has flared up periodically over the last 10 years, pitting Muslims against Christians, settlers against indigenes, one ethnic group against the other, including confrontations between different Islamic sects. For example, in 2007, at the Kofar Ran district of Bauchi city, violent clashes erupted by the Shiites and the Jamaatul Nasrul Islam (JNI). It was, however, not long before the riots were brought under control [42].

The case for non-Boko Haram violent conflict

Since 2009, acts of violence by the Islamist armed group known as Boko Haram have been carried out across northern and central Nigeria with increasing sophistication and deadliness, prompting the Nigerian military to carry out assaults against them [43]. Boko Haram as an Islamic sect is a loose organization, difficult to determine who is a registered member, a follower or a sympathizer. The loose membership includes Islamic students, unemployed youths, students from tertiary institutions, Chadian and Nigerian migrants living in Borno and Yobe states etc. Boko Haram has unleashed violence on Christians over the years [44]. Records show that since 2011, increasing Boko Haram violence from the North-East led to the death of over 3,000 people, mostly Christian civilians and security personnel, in addition to about 3.3 million Nigerians driven from their homes [45]. Between 2012 and 2014 alone, 4,099 Christians were reported killed (though not all by Boko Haram) according to Jubilee Campaign, an advocacy group based in the United States. World Watch Research (WWR) reports for the World Watch List 2015 reporting period alone, which is from 1 November 2013 till 31 October 2014, a number of 2,484 Christians killed for faith-related reasons by Boko Haram and others, acknowledging that the number is the bottom-line given the difficulties in gathering data in the northern part of the country. The sect has succeeded in establishing a culture of fear, in addition to carrying out unlawful killings [46], attacks on churches, media houses, schools and the abduction of about 276 female students from Chibok Government Girls Secondary School on April 14, 2014, more than 70% of whom are Christians [47].

Over the years, there have been different opinions regarding the factors and the implications of these Boko Haram attacks. Within public discourse in Nigeria as well as scholarly circles, Boko Haram is motivated by religious, ideological factors in addition to relative economic deprivation. Thus, anything un-Islamic should be rejected: western education, women's empowerment, democracy, Judeo-Christian history and traditions upon which western civilization is allegedly constructed. In terms of religious ideology, they assume the authority to

declare Christians and non-Boko Haram Muslims as *infidels*. Strategically too, the sect seeks to inspire other Islamic groups and movements to take up arms against Christians. The implication is that most violent conflict in northern Nigeria, if not all of it, is linked immediately and directly to the members of Boko Haram. Sometimes, even when Boko Haram issues statements to deny some of these attacks, public discourse and media reports appear to link these attacks directly to the members of the sect. The result is either the blurring of the line between Boko Haram and non-Boko Haram violent conflict or the massive failure in both academic and policy research to distinguish between how the two affect Christians in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria. More importantly, the failure to make this distinction downplays the role of those who are not members of Boko Haram but inspired by the same radical Islamic ideology to carry out attacks in the Middle Belt region hiding under the guise of environmental degradation.

Owing to this, the research investigates the non-Boko Haram violent conflict ongoing in northern Nigeria. The non-Boko Haram violent conflict is carried out by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen and pastoralists, supported by other Muslims who have settled in particular areas of the Middle Belt region for a long time. The violence includes attacks against Christians, their farms, shops and homes. This includes cattle rustling, inter-ethno-religious clashes, abduction, rape and outright banditry [48]. The presence of police and military checkpoints on the highways has done nothing to check the violent crimes against Christians in this region. Those involved in these attacks use military styled weapons ranging from AK-47 rifles and Kalashnikov, as well as machetes, knives and charms [49]. The violence is intrinsically inspired by the radical Islamic ideology espoused by Boko Haram that calls for the establishment of an Islamic state throughout Nigeria. It is also motivated by the expansionist principle of *darul Islam*. It is an Islamic religious principle that divides the world into Islamic and non-Islamic, and the obligation to ensure that the non-Islamic world is brought under Islamic rule. The violence also pitches the indigenes against settlers. In the case of the Middle Belt region, the indigenes are mostly Christians and the settlers are seen as the Muslims. In a severely divided society such as the Middle Belt region of Nigeria the level of mutual distrust between Christians and Muslims has grown to an extent that 'religious identity' determines who can have access to political power. Thus, since Nigeria's return to multiparty democracy in 1999, ethno-religious politics has re-emerged to play a prominent role in how political power is shared, dictated by religious affiliation. In this context, the research argues that though non-Boko Haram violent conflict may appear linked to the issues of environment and migration, in reality, it is about Islam trying to dominate Christianity and other non-Muslim groups in the Middle Belt region. The research considers specifically the nature of non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region's states of Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa.

Chapter Three: The trend of non-Boko Haram violence since 2011, Christians as victims

As already discussed, non-Boko Haram violent conflict, in addition to the issues of contestation over environmental resources in the context of environmental degradation and migration, is intrinsically inspired by radical Islamic ideology both as purported by the expansionist principle of *darul Islam* and by Boko Haram. It is a principle that divides the world into Islamic and non-Islamic, and the obligation to ensure that the non-Islamic world is brought under Islamic rule. Furthermore, it is a long-standing contestation over the religious, political and ethno-regional domination of the Middle Belt region of Nigeria motivated by the indigene settler ideology. It is an ideology that pitches the indigenes of a place against the settlers in the face of intense competition and socio-religious and political contestation. The research specifically dwells on the Middle Belt region's states of Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa. This is because the favorable environmental condition of this region attracts migrant communities. More importantly, these states have the highest numbers of indigenous Christian population, an essential aspect of our investigation.

Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in other northern states

There are incidences of non-Boko Haram violent conflict that have occurred outside the Middle Belt region. They are non-Boko Haram to the extent that they are not directly linked to specific members of the Boko Haram sect. However, they appear to be contestation over land and resources in addition to other criminal activities. For instance, in Katsina state, the violence has been in the form of cattle-rustling, rape and incessant killings. In March 2014, a day when President Jonathan visited the state, unknown gunmen were on the rampage, attacking villages, burning houses and local markets. Over 96 people were killed and many were left injured in different villages. The gunmen are alleged to have come on motorbikes and gone on house-to-house raids, shouting 'Allahu Akhbar' [50]. In Zamfara state, more than 300 people have been killed following series of deadly attacks in different villages. In 2013, the governor of Zamfara state, Alhaji Abdulaziz while addressing members of the State House of Assembly, claimed that about 160 people were killed and 6200 cattle rustled in addition to the abduction of 10 women by the bandits and cattle rustlers [51]. These attacks preceded warnings issued by gunmen to the Bawar Daji community in Anka local government area in July 2013, asking the residents to desist from cultivating lands in the surrounding forest. Similar threats were issued to a construction company to vacate a road construction site or face the dire consequences [52]. In Adamawa state one of these attacks took place in Ganye, in March 2013. Interviews conducted indicated this attack, widely reported as a Boko Haram attack, was indeed a revenge attack by suspected Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen against the Chamba farmers who killed one of their kin [53].

It would be unfair to immediately link these attacks to specific members of the Boko Haram sect without confirmed security reports saying so. However, it would be reasonable to argue that most of the perpetrators claim to be attacking and fighting the *infidels*, either Christians who have lived in these areas as minority groups for a good number of years or Muslims considered as wayward, not authentic Muslims, who have collaborated with infidels. Most of their attacks are accompanied by shouts of 'Allahu Akhbar', *Allah is the greatest*. For instance, after the attack carried out in March 2014 when President Jonathan visited Katsina state, some

of the suspects confessed that they were protesting against a Christian president, an infidel visiting their state. Again, they appeared to take advantage of the fertile conflict situation created by the activities of Boko Haram. Knowing that government and security attention had been deployed to fight Boko Haram, the ensuing vacuum became an opportunity for these faceless groups to unleash their activities on society. While these non-Boko Haram attacks appear very limited in other northern states, the scale and level of atrocities in the Middle Belt region is massive and appears calculated. We shall now examine the specific cases of Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states.

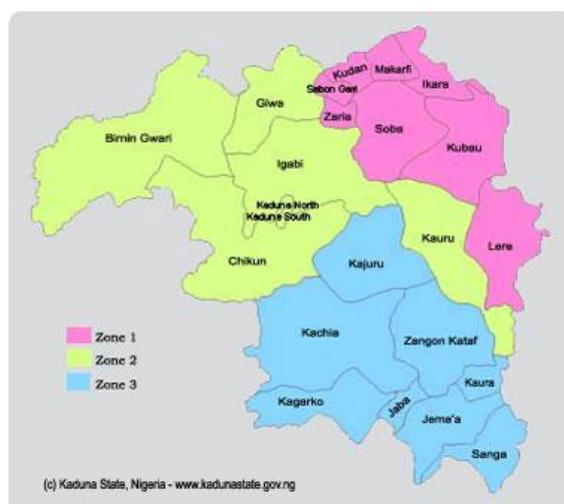
Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria

As earlier stated, Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states will be specifically examined because they are the most affected by this non-Boko Haram violent conflict at the moment. In each of these states, the context, the nature of the conflict and the number of victims will be assessed. This is to underscore the differences in ethnic and religious composition, and how such composition affects the dynamics of the conflict.

KADUNA STATE: Context

Kaduna state has 23 local government areas, divided into three zones with a population of 6,066,562 people based on the 2006 Nigerian census figures. Zone three is the southern Kaduna zone with eight local government areas and a population of 1,718,476 people. Zone three is mostly inhabited by indigenous Christian communities, and in comparison to zones one and two, it has a fertile environment for cultivation and food production. Over the years, thousands of Muslim migrants and businessmen, including herdsmen and pastoralists have migrated to the southern zone, looking for greener pastures and a better environment for cultivation. Consequently, most of the non-Boko Haram violent conflict appears to occur significantly in southern Kaduna.

Map of Kaduna state showing the number of local government areas:



Source: <http://www.ramalanyero.com/population/>

Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in southern Kaduna

The evidence of non-Boko Haram violent conflict has been linked to ethnic clashes between the Muslim Hausa-Fulani and the people of Southern Kaduna who are mostly indigenous Christians. For instance, Christian communities in southern Kaduna, particularly in the local government areas of Jama'a, Kachia, Kagarko, Kaura and Sanga have been subjected to a series of attacks from suspected Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen since 2011. The attacks have suddenly increased in a manner of arithmetic progression as Nigeria approaches another election year in 2015. For instance, Sanga local government area, with an estimated land expanse of 78 square kilometers and a population of 149,333 going by the 2006 National Population Census, has witnessed many attacks that killed thousands and dislodged almost a quarter of the population from their original abodes. A reliable source confirmed that in Kobin village, 49 people were killed while 107 houses were burnt in the neighboring village of Dogon-Daji in a single attack [54]. Unfortunately, these villages are said to have been raided three times between January and May, 2014. An official of the local government disclosed that over 150 villages were sacked, adding that some of the internally displaced persons were taking refuge in the neighboring local government areas of Akwanga and Wamba in Nasarawa state. Some of the displaced persons have sought refuge in Bokkos local government area of Plateau state [55]. When NCSAN visited Gwantu, the headquarters of Sanga local government, three camps for the internally displaced persons were identified.



Internally Displaced Christians at ERCC, Gwantu in Kaduna state, women and their children as they line up to receive bread from a NGO (Source: NCSAN)

The camps include one at the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ (ERCC), the other at LGEA primary school and the last is located at Divisional Police Headquarters. The camp at Divisional Police Headquarters was segmented, one part for Christian refugees and the other for Muslims who have escaped for fear of reprisal attacks in Gwantu. The tense suspicion at the Division Police headquarters between the two faiths seems to suggest, as NCSAN observes, a complete sense of mutual distrust and a bitter contestation over land and territory. Two residents of Gwnatu, who are now internally displaced persons, insist that Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen are using the conflict to execute an Islamic agenda of killing Christians and intimidating those that may survive to recant the Christian faith for Islam [56]. One of the men, who lost his two children in the violent conflict, blamed the Nigerian state for turning a blind eye to the excesses of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen migrating to the Middle Belt region. He wondered why the Fulanis are allowed to possess sophisticated weapons, with no law making such action illegal, while other ethnic nationalities are constantly harassed and arrested by security operatives for possessing similar weapons [57]. According to him this attitude of the security

operatives can only be seen as supporting the impunity of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim nomads [58].

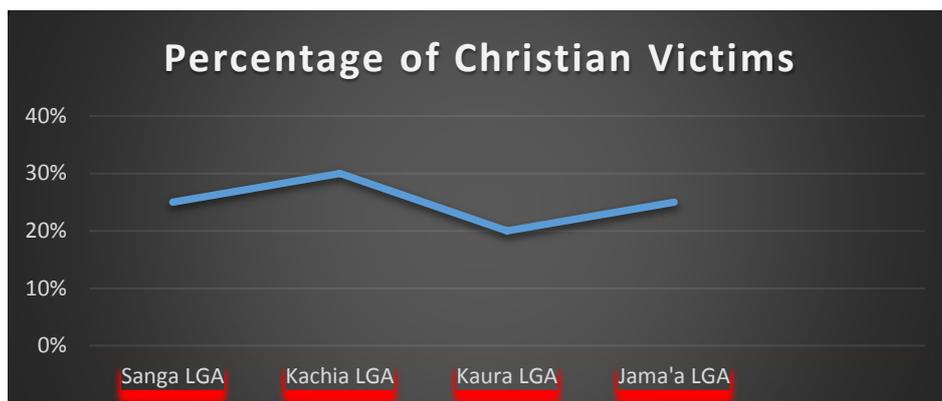
In Kachia, an official of the local government informed NCSAN that about 37% of the 265,000 people in the local government area were displaced by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen attacks on the Christian population [59]. Narrating his experience, a pastor said before a raid on his village of Kurmi, he had consistently received phone calls with this message: ‘I am coming for you and your church’ [60]. The pastor maintained that a Fulani Muslim was unmistakably behind the threats with sinister messages that would likely be considered a danger to public safety in a civilized society [61]. From the content of the message that the pastor had received, it is difficult to ignore the extent to which religious institution and religious faith are a keg of gunpowder, as Christians and churches have remained the obvious targets. A reliable source, who spoke to NCSAN on behalf of scores of other women in the internally displaced persons’ camp located at ECWA along Kachia-Kafanchan road (Kafanchan is the capital city of Jama’a local government area), blames the conflict on Hausa-Fulani Muslim political dominance and their quest to eliminate Christians [62]. A resident of Ambe village, who simply identified himself as Bala, regretted that many people, mostly women and children are usually ambushed and slaughtered like animals by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim invaders. As it stands, several families have been wiped out completely [63].



Burnt church in Kachia, headquarters of Kachia local government area of Kaduna state (Source: NCSAN)

In Jama’a, Kachia, Kaura and Sanga local government areas, the conflict situation has reached its crescendo in such a way that people have relocated from remote villages for fear of the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen to urban and semi-urban areas. This accounts for the springing up of new settlements in places like Jagindi, Gododo, Kagoro, Maiakuya and Manchok among others.

Chart: The percentage of Christian Victims of non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the four most affected Local Government Areas (LGA) of Kaduna State



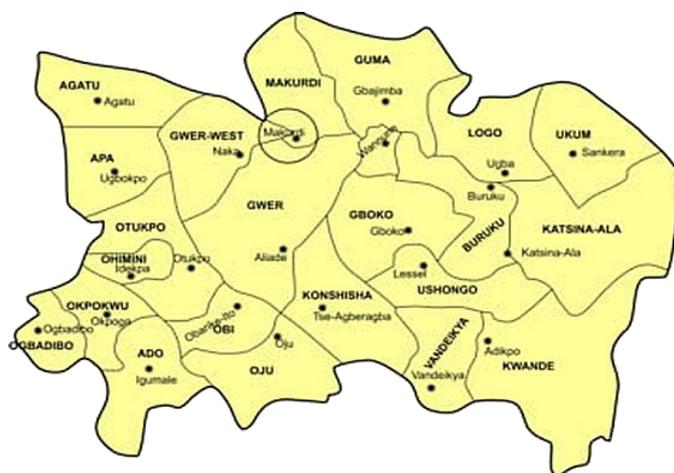
The chart gives percentages of Christian victims in percentages of the total population in these local government areas, although it is difficult to put a static figure to them. The victims are defined in terms of those who have died and those who have been displaced. Some even die in the process of being displaced. The percentages are an approximation from what people can recall.

Regarding Kachia, the official gave 37% of the population of 265,000 in the local government area being displaced. NCSAN took a lower percentage in the chart, because they had difficulty in defining 'displacement' in the context of Kachia. This is because NCSAN was specifically dealing with Kachia. However, during the interviews they discovered other people were not necessarily from Kachia but other local governments outside Kachia but affected by similar conflicts. In other words, the chairman's figure did not tally with what NCSAN had on ground, as they discovered that people taking refuge in Kachia were also IDPs from Kaura, Sanga and other places.

BENUE STATE: Context

Benue State has 23 local government areas. It is bordered by Nasarawa state to the North, Taraba state to the East, Ebonyi and Cross River states to the South and Kogi state to the West. It has a population of about 5,181,642 according to the 2006 national census. It is a rich agricultural region, full of rivers, and could be called the breadbasket of Nigeria. Crops grown there include potatoes, cassava, soya bean, guinea corn, flax, yams and beniseed. Benue state is largely defined by its Christian population and identity, followed by a tiny percentage of traditional adherents. Some commentators describe Benue state as a miniature Rome in northern Nigeria due to its huge Christian population. While the state has few tribes including the Idoma, Igala and the Tiv, popular evidence suggests that more than 88% of the population are Christians. The presence of Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers, particularly in towns, has given rise to the scanty presence of mosques.

Map of Benue state showing the number of local government areas:



Source: <http://zodml.org/Nigeria/Geography/Benue%20State/>

Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in Benue state

Following a bitter rivalry between the Tiv and Fulani ethnic groups, a total of 853 people have lost their lives since June 2014. While the Fulani herdsmen claimed to have lost 214 people in addition to 3200 cows, the Tiv people reportedly killed are estimated to be 633 excluding children and women who died in ramshackle camps last year. Again, six soldiers attached to the 72 battalion in Makurdi were killed in the cross-fire that ensued between the two groups during this period. Five of the soldiers were killed in Agatu in January this year while one, a captain, was beheaded in Guma local government area of Benue state. So far, the Tiv people in Guma, Gwer, Gwer-West, Makurdi and other towns at the border with Taraba state have recorded about 458 deaths and over 350 communities have been sacked and are now living in refugee camps. A Catholic priest in Makurdi and a coordinator for the distribution of relief materials, indicated that until June, there were about 175 deaths in 34 villages overrun by invaders in 2013 alone.

Additionally, the Christian-Tiv in Guma, Gwer-West, Katsina-Ala, Kwande, Logo and Makurdi local government areas of Benue state are displaced by marauding Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. The worst hit of these local government areas are Guma, Gwer-West, Logo and

Makurdi. For instance, in Makurdi local government area alone, there are ten different camps of internally displaced persons. They include uncompleted Aper Aku Housing Estate North-Bank, St. Mary's Primary School Daudu, Roman Catholic Mission Primary School North-Bank, Army Children Primary School North-Bank, LGEA Primary School North-Bank, LGEA Primary School Ahwa, LGEA Primary School Agan, LGEA Primary School Low-Cost, LGEA Primary School Tyodugh and LGEA Primary School Wurukum. At LGEA Primary School Wurukum, available records show that there are 542 family households, with a population of 4804 persons sharing 12 blocks of classrooms, meant to accommodate at most 50 pupils per class [64]. What this means is that a huge population is living within the premises of the primary school. As a result, some of the deaths particularly of vulnerable women, children and the elderly are either unreported or not recorded. One of those affected, who lost his only male child is sure that if they had been at home, his child would not have died of pneumonia [65].

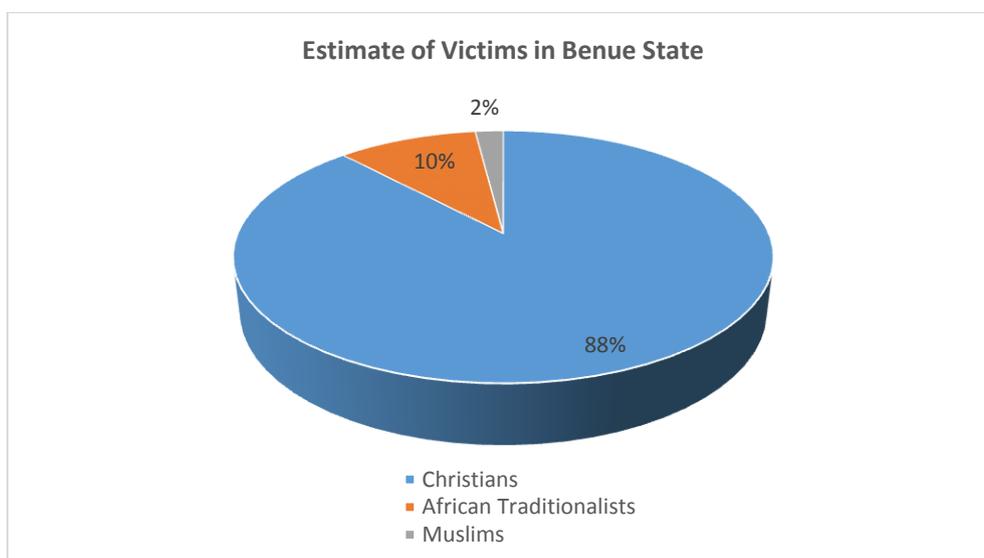
Pictures of Internally Displaced Persons in Makurdi, the Benue state capital:



Source: NCSAN

The pitiable living conditions at the LGEA primary school Wurukum in Makurdi, the Benue state capital, is a reflection of what is occurring in all the camps. A priest of Makurdi Catholic Diocese suggests that the only difference in the camps is the slight variation in the number of displaced persons [66]. NCSAN’s visit to Ugba and Anyiin in Logo local government area, Zaki Biam, Kyado and Jootar in Ukum local government area, confirms the plight of the internally displaced persons in all the camps. Meanwhile, a resident of Wurukum area of Makurdi (Makurdi LGA) believes that the number of internally displaced persons who got absorbed into homes of relatives, friends and well-wishers is much higher than those that have unfortunately remained in camps [67]. One of the residents of the camps informed the team of NCSAN researchers that the camps were not set up by the government. According to him the internally displaced persons just went into these primary schools that were empty, occasioned by the industrial action embarked upon by teachers to drive home their demands from government. It is from this scenario that the camps have emerged [68]. A woman who survived one of the attacks hinted that the attacks on the Agatu ethnic Christian population in Agatu local government area as well as on the Idoma ethnic Christian group in Adoka locality (Otukpo local government area) of Benue state has led to the displacement and migration of over 6,000 people. This is an indication that the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen’s torrential attacks on Benue communities are driven by religious rather than ethnic considerations [69]. A security expert in Benue state claimed that the on-going Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen’s clash with sedentary farmers has serious religious undertones [70].

Chart: Percentage of Christian Victims of non-Boko Haram Violent Conflict in Benue State



The chart gives the percentage of victims spread among Christians, African Traditionalists (ATR) and Muslims. The Muslim victims are mostly victims of reprisal attacks from Christians and ATRs resisting Muslim domination, and at the same time protecting their farmlands and their faith. However, as indicated in the chart, these reprisal attacks are very low. It is important to note that because the majority of the Tiv in Benue state are Christians, the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen do not make distinction between ATRs and Christians. They want to Islamize whoever occupies the land.

TARABA STATE: Context

Taraba state is bounded in the West by Plateau state and Benue state and on the eastern border by Adamawa state and the Republic of Cameroon. On the northern border are Bauchi and Gombe states, with Cross River state on its southern border. Taraba state has sixteen local government areas, with a population of about 2,300,736 people. Taraba state has an environment conducive to the production of major cash crops such as coffee, tea, groundnuts, cotton, maize, rice, sorghum, millet, cassava and yam. This makes the state attractive to migrating herdsmen and pastoralists. More importantly, it is the gateway to southern Nigeria from the North-East. Consequently, thousands of refugees crossing over to southern Nigeria and pastoralists seeking greener pastures are attracted to Taraba state.

In Nigeria religion is never made part of the census count. Interviews conducted indicated that in Taraba state in terms of religion, about 55% is Christian, 32% Muslim, 12% followers of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and 1% self-professed free thinkers. Most of the Christians are found in the central and southern part of the state. The high population of Muslims in Taraba state is understandably hinged on two factors. The first is that the population of Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers has steadily grown over the years due to a high birth rate as well as migration to the favorable environmental conditions of Taraba state compared to most northern states. The second factor is the pastoral group of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen who move in and out of the state seasonally, with some finally settling down, especially at the border between Taraba state and Cameroon. As such, it is difficult to calculate the actual population and the 32% is seen as a 'representative figure'. It is also fair to concede that some of the conflicts in Taraba state may be linked to ethnic contests over land between the Tiv and Jukun ethnic groups. However, this particular research was limited to religious conflict perpetrated by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen.

Map of Taraba state showing the number of local government areas:



Source: www.nigerianmuse.com/...maps.../maps-of-various-states-and-their-local

Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in Taraba state

Currently, Taraba state is being ravaged by the non-Boko Haram violent conflict. The southern part of the state, which is predominantly Christian, is the worst hit, with mass internal displacement due to Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen attacks on Christian communities, particularly those living in areas close to Benue state, previously considered as safe havens. These include the towns and villages of Wukari, Donga, Isha-gogo, Tseke, Gidin-Dorowa, Nyimhina, Gborbegha, Borkono, Takum, Jinuwa-Nyife, Ibi and Gbogudo. There is also internal migration towards Jalingo, the Taraba state capital, as thousands of indigenous farming communities, mostly Christians, scramble for safety. Since 2013, the Christian communities in Southern Taraba Senatorial District and those on the fringes of the Central Senatorial District, especially in Gassol and Bali local government areas, have come under attack from the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen; killing women and children. In Gassol local government for instance, villages such as Borno-Kurukuru, Nyamtsav, Orga, Igbough, Tyougese, Orshio, Ukuusu, among many others have been ransacked by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen, destroying farms, burning homes and churches. In Dinya, Catholic Diocese of Jalingo, both the church and the priest's residence were burnt. A Catholic priest in Gidin-Dorowa (Wukari local government area) informed NCSAN that 65% of parish local churches were burnt while the entire population was displaced [71].



One of the Bishops inspecting vandalized churches (Source: NCSAN)

The fear expressed by most residents, including the priests, is that the conflict is likely to lead to permanent migration. In Ibi and Wukari local government areas, the conflict is clearly using religion to execute a political agenda. A resident postulates that the conflict is all about getting rid of the Christian population to pave way for the emergence of a Muslim governor in Taraba state 2015 general election [72]. This position is widely held within Christian circles of Taraba state. One of the pastors in the area says if the conflict is not religious, why are they burning churches and attacking only Christians [73]?

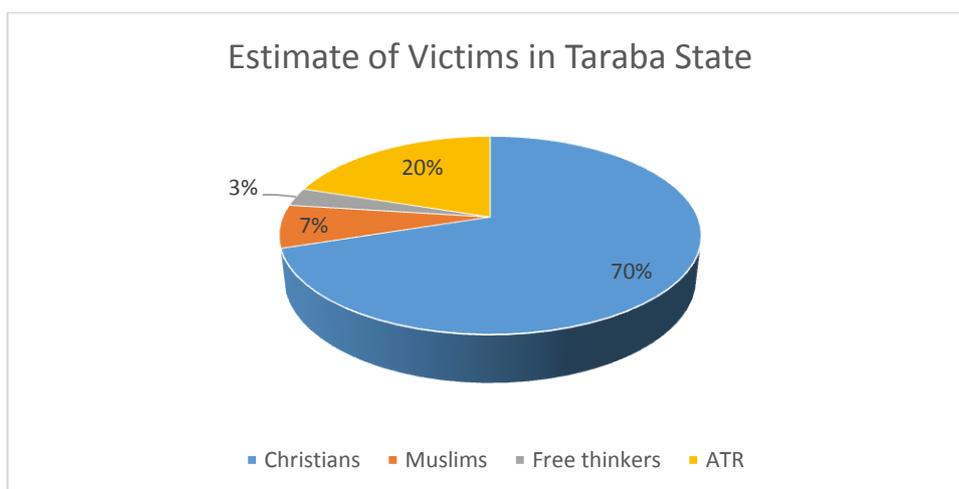


Pictures of a church, pastor's residence and vehicle burnt in Ibi, police man looking at the pastor counting his losses (Source: NCSAN)

In the opinion of some observers, the conflict is not exactly ethnic since other ethnic groups such as Igbo, Mumuye and Ogoja, who are non-Tiv but Christians, have also been attacked around Gazabo, Maihula and Nahuta areas of Bali local government area. In Ibi and Wukari too, the Jukun Christians, like the Tiv, have come under attack by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen, supported by other Muslims who have settled in and around these towns [74]. The whole idea is to weed out the Christian population to pave way for Muslims, some of whom are not even Nigerians, to take over farmlands. In Mutum-Biyu, Sabon-Gida and Tella (Gassol local government area), there are unconfirmed reports of a heavy influx of non-Nigerian Muslims who are taking over farms of Christians that have been dislodged.

Some of the survivors interviewed in Mutum Biyu told NCSAN that the grand plan to kill and forcefully evacuate the Christian population is so perfected that the media is forbidden to even talk about it [75]. This probably explains why the local media is simply silent over the matter and the international media is held hostage outright by the danger of one story line of Boko Haram so that it seems unable to talk about these killings and displacements. NCSAN observes that there is no single government-designated camp for the displaced. Rather, on their own, they are taking refuge within seemingly secured churches in urban centres such as St. Paul's Catholic Church in Bali, St. Mary's Catholic Church in Wukari, and Holy Trinity Catholic Church in Takum among others. It is possible that the government is deliberately ignoring the need to set up camps for two reasons: first, to avoid a situation whereby the huge population of the displaced attracts the attention of the world to their plight, and second, to conveniently hide the atrocities committed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen.

Chart: Percentage of Christian Victims of non-Boko Haram Violent Conflict in Taraba State



The chart presents the percentages of Christian, Muslim, Free thinker and ATR victims of violence in the state. Although both Muslims and Atheists have been affected by the conflict, it is difficult to know the precise numbers. Most of the villages NCSAN visited, mostly Christian villages, have been deserted. 70% of houses and properties destroyed, particularly in southern Taraba, belong to Christians...this includes farmlands, houses, shops, displacement and death. At the moment, there is still ongoing investigation in the case of Taraba state at the National Human Rights Commission in Nigeria.

In the Taraba conflict, over 2,000 people have been killed and tens of thousands displaced. However, this too is based on evidence from the responses to NCSAN's interviews in areas they visited. Consequently, the 70% of the victims in Taraba are Christians based on our interviews and places visited. In certain communities like Wukari (capital city of the local government area Wukari), there were reprisal attacks against Muslims, though minimal and representing like 7% of the victims. It is reasonable to argue that Muslim herdsmen suffer reprisal attacks from both Christians and ATRs not for religious reasons, but for the individuals to protect their lands. There is a vast majority of traditional worshippers in Taraba, particularly around Ardo-Kola local government area, Gembu (capital city of Sardauna local government area) and Zing local government area. They are targeted, because of their faith and farmlands. There are very few people who indicated during the interviews that they are free thinkers. Most of them too have suffered, but for the reason of identity, belonging to the same ethnic group as Christians, rather than their faith.

NASARAWA STATE: Context

Nasarawa state was created in 1996 out of neighboring Plateau state. Located in the North-Central region of Nigeria, it is bordered on the West by the Federal Capital Territory, the North by Kaduna state, the South by Benue and Kogi states, and on the East by Plateau and Taraba states. Nasarawa's main economic activity is agriculture: cash crops such as yam, cassava and egusi (melon). Nasarawa state has thirteen local government areas with a population of 1,863,275 according to the 2006 census. There are about twenty-nine indigenous ethnic groups, and the major ethnic groups include Agatu, Basa, Eggon, Gbagyi, Gade, Goemai, Gwandara, Ham, Kofyar and Lijili. The Tiv ethnic group in Nasarawa, mostly found at the border between Nasarawa and Benue states, constitutes another major ethnic group in Nasarawa state [76].

The 1963 Nigerian census puts the percentage of Muslims in what is now Nasarawa state at about 30% of the population, while about 14% were Christian and a majority of 56% adherents of 'other' religions. The majority 56% were alleged to be the Eggon traditional adherents, and for the past four decades, most of them have converted to Christianity, through the instrumentality of missionary education. Unconfirmed polls suggest that the Christian population could be as high as 65%, Muslim 32% and the 'other' is 3%. Despite these unconfirmed figures, the political landscape is controlled by Muslims [77]. The number of Muslim officials in government, from Governor and Deputy Governor to Senate, House of Representatives, House of Assembly and Local Government Chairmen is 31 out of 48 positions, which is 65% of the total number of politicians that wield enormous powers in Nasarawa State.

Map of Nasarawa state showing the number of local government areas:



Source: www.the-nigeria.com/2014/05/list-of-local-governement-areas-in.html

Non-Boko Haram violent conflict in Nasarawa State

Evidence gathered from the field, particularly from Yelwa Bassa of Kokona local government area to Jangaro of Awe local government area, Assokio of Lafia local government area to Akpanaja of Doma local government area attests to the fact that the conflict rocking Nasarawa state has left in its wake tales of destruction, sorrow and bereavement as human lives and

people's means of livelihood have been destroyed and are still being destroyed on a mass scale. The targeted communities that are at the receiving end of man's inhumanity to man are Christian indigenous farming communities. The conflict in Nasarawa state is such that ethnic nationalities with a high Christian population are usually targeted, without any established or known provocation other than the difference of Christian faith to Islam. For instance, the Mighili ethnic group in Duduguru was overrun by a marauding Hausa-Fulani Muslim militia that killed scores of people and destroyed property worth millions of naira. Another ethnic group of high Christian population that came under attack was the Tiv, found in Awe, Doma, Keana and Obi local government areas. Available statistics show that the Tiv ethnic group, who are Christians, in these areas constitute about 32% of the population. This population is displaced and many have migrated as far as Niger state and some remote villages within the Federal Capital Territory where they are engaging in farming and hunting.

Next to the Tiv and Mighili in Christian population is the Eggon ethnic group. Socio-political evidence shows that the Eggon are not particularly favoured in the political power equation of the state. For instance, although the most populated group in the entire state, the Eggon have only one local government area, namely Nasarawa Eggon. This has harmful socio-economic implications, particularly in Nigeria where managing any tier of government is a means of controlling state resources and economic power. This unfortunate development has persisted over the years, regardless of the fact that the Eggon are arguably the most educated group in the state. The Eggon ethnic group continues to experience physical harassment from unfriendly neighbors and collaborators [78] as hinted by a resident from Mada Station, Agidi Development Area. This snowballed into a huge conflict that has led to wanton destruction of lives and property.

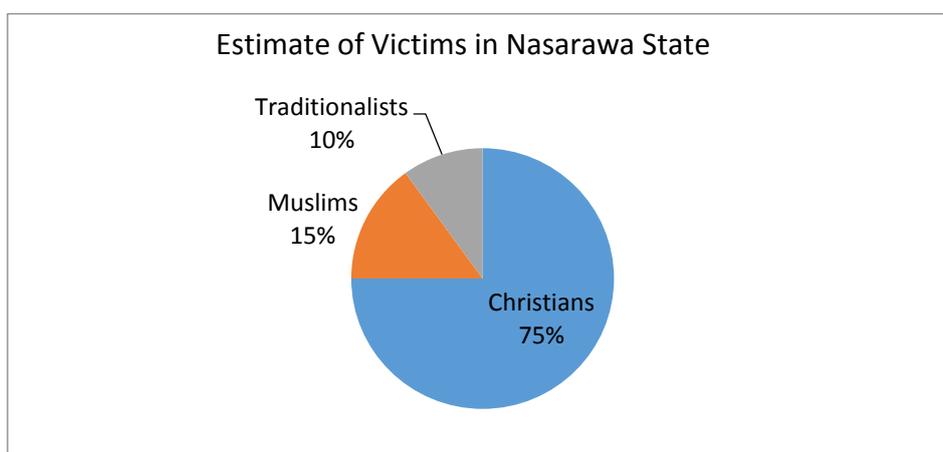


Burnt roofing sheets of one of the Evangelical Reformed Church of Christ at Yelwan-Bassa, Kokona LGA of Nasarawa state (Source: NCSAN)

The Eggon, under the banner of Ombatse, rose in defense of the Eggon ethnic group to press for self-identity and emancipation. The Ombatse is the name of a traditional religious cult, a spiritual group of the Eggon people that was revived into a militant group, constituted to fight the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen who are committed to taking over Eggon land for the purpose of permanent settlement and grazing. This conflict was executed along religious lines as groups that are mostly Muslims targeted the Eggon, who are predominantly Christians. The displacement of people due to the conflict between Ombatse and Fulani Muslims and their collaborators is such that socio-economic activities in the southern and central senatorial

districts of Nasarawa state are largely paralyzed. The Nasarawa State Emergency Management Agency (NASEMA) disclosed that over 35% of villages in the affected area are displaced, 27% of the villages are living in fear and only 38% of the villages can lay claim to some stability and relative peace [79]. One of the Christian victims is of the opinion that the conflict is targeted at Christians. He explains that Keffi, Nasarawa and Wamba towns that are traditionally Islam in outlook do not suffer conflicts as Christian enclaves do. In his opinion the Fulani Muslims have taken stronghold in these places and would not do anything that will rock the boat of peace and stability in these domains [80]. However, they can gang up to destroy other places that have Christian dominance.

Chart: Percentage of Christian Victims of non-Boko Haram Violent Conflict in Nasarawa State



From the interviews conducted, the reasons for the high population of Christian victims is because, first, the conflict takes place in areas less populated by Muslims like Kadarko (Keana local government area), Tudu Adaku (Obi local government area) and Jangado (Awe local government area). A combined Eggon indigenous response made of Christians and some Traditionalists, pushed by ethno-religious and political considerations, launched counter-attacks against Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen, as well as the Alago ethnic group, which is predominantly Muslim, using the Ombatse cult. Public opinion among the Eggon Christians indicates that the predominant Muslim Alago ethnic group who hold the levers of power in Nasarawa state connived with the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen to dominate and control indigenous Christian communities.

Far reaching implications for the states concerned

The on-going conflict has far reaching implications for the states concerned, but particularly for the Christian populations in those states. The first concern is that of food security. In all the states under consideration, particularly Taraba and Benue states, the majority of those displaced are Christians who make up substantial part of the farming community, just like in Nasarawa, Kaduna (southern Kaduna) and Plateau states. Consequently, the instability caused by the incessant conflict, will likely lead to food shortages for Christian communities that depend on subsistence farming.

In addition, there are reports that herdsmen are now in the habit of pushing their herds to eat up crops of farmers. This means shortage of food for Christian families that substantially depend on subsistence farming for survival. In another development, the conflict will frustrate

the attainment of Millennium Development Goals as children are displaced and no longer go to school, homes are burnt and in some instances vandalized, and accessing medical services has become more challenging than ever. This means many Christians will be deprived of access to education, medical facilities and the comfort of their homes. Finally, the ongoing policy consultations by the state governments in Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states to allocate lands and 'classify' them as grazing fields, means that vast swaths of land will be taken away from indigenous Christian communities and made into grazing fields for Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen.

Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen attacks on indigenous Christian communities

The tables below are showing the level of Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen attacks on indigenous Christian communities in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria.

The lists are not complete. They give an impression of what is going on across the different states of the Middle Belt region. Some states appear in the table but not in the main discourse such as Bauchi state. The reason is that though NCSAN's study looks at the whole of the Middle Belt region, in terms of further details it concentrates specifically on Southern Kaduna, Benue, Taraba and Nassarawa states.

The reporting period is from 1-1-2011 to 31-3-2014. Meanwhile NCSAN is still recording incidents and carrying interviews especially in Taraba state.

The reason why data on Taraba state are (largely) excluded from these tables is because NCSAN wanted to treat Taraba state as a special case. At the time of the research there was an ongoing national human rights investigation into the atrocities in Taraba state. The figures on the specific Taraba section are the ones NCSAN took during the short interviews they had in Taraba. Taraba state should still be considered a significant area of study. It has the highest number of Christians in the North-East. The violence in Taraba state has occurred more than ever recorded or reported. It is both religious and ethnic, because Muslims and Christians find themselves on the opposite side of ethnic groups. In short, NCSAN does not want to rush it. Now with the findings of the human rights investigations, they are likely to have more information. That is why Taraba state was deliberately excluded.

The source of the data is mostly from the people NCSAN interviewed and the villages visited. Sometimes it was difficult to independently confirm some of the stories. Due to the security situation, some people were not willing to talk.

The reason for the "not specified" (N/S) in the tables below is because, due to lack of documentation and data, most of those interviewed are not able to put any figure to the numbers requested either in terms of people killed or properties destroyed. Certainly, people are killed or properties destroyed, but most of the times the figures are conflicting or people simply say they do not know. Again, though NCSAN encounters physically a burnt house, some people were not ready to talk, and sometimes conflicting figures were given. So, in the tables it was difficult to give a total figure of people killed, people injured or property destroyed. But in the discourse of the four states, as presented in the text above, NCSAN is able to quote directly people interviewed and get figures from those interviewed on the ground.

Reported cases in 2011

s/n	Reported date of attack	No. of persons killed	No. of persons injured	Property destroyed	Place of Attack	State
1	27-1-2011	16	17	28 houses	Tafawa-Balewa town, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
2	27-1-2011	1	11	20 houses	Arewa village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
3	27-1-2011	1	7	32 houses	Pekman, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi

4	10-3-2011	2	10	28 houses	T/ Balewa town, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
5	10-3-2011	2	N/S	35 houses	Gumel village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
6	10-3-2011	N/S	3	44 houses	Mingil village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
7	10-3-2011	4	N/S	52 houses	Gongo village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
8	10-3-2011	N/S	N/S	48 houses	Malanchi village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
9	10-3-2011	N/S	N/S	20 houses	Zwall village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
10	11-3-2011	N/S	N/S	17 houses	Tafare-Fada village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
11	11-3-2011	N/S	N/S	57 houses	Tafare Sabon-Gida village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
12	11-3-2011	N/S	N/S	50 houses	Goshe village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
13	16-3-2011	4	15	23 houses	Lim-Bisa, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
14	2-4-2011	1	5	36 houses	Gwaska-Bom village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
15	2-4-2011	N/S	N/S	34 houses	Namu Village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
16	2-4-2011	3	N/S	38 houses	Gurbuli village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
17	4-4-2011	1	N/S	N/S	Yola village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
18	7-4-2011	5	10	70 houses	Barewa village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
19	12-4-2011	1	N/S	22 houses	Gunlung village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
20	21-4-2011	7	N/S	23 houses	Kutaru village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
21	4-5-2011	16	N/S	14 houses	Kurumin-dodo village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
22	7-5-2011	N/S	N/S	25 houses	Mbat 11 village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
23	8-5-2011	N/S	N/S	25 houses	Gid-Gid hamma, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
24	22-6-2011	20	N/S	Over 100 houses	Udei, Guma LGA	Benue
25	18-9-2011	3	N/S	N/S	Bitaro and Koi Jebba LGA	Kaduna
26	19-11-2011	4	5	3 houses	Gargare village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
27	17-11-2011	2	N/S	N/S	Muntokshi, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi

Reported cases in 2012

s/n	Reported date of attack	No. of persons killed	No. of persons injured	Property destroyed	Place of attack	State
1	11-1-2012	N/S	N/S	N/S	Pyakman, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
2	19-1-2012	N/S	2	3 houses	Jigawa village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
3	22-1-2012	15	5	14 houses	T/Balewa town, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
4	30-2-2012	2	N/S	N/S	Gwasko – Gwagwalada	FCT
5	12-3-2012	N/S	N/S	5 houses	Goshe village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
6	15-3-2012	N/S	N/S	10 houses	T/Balewa town, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
7	15-3-2012	N/S	N/S	N/S	Peknang village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
8	20-3-2012	2	N/S	N/S	Palang, Bachit district in Riyom LGA	Plateau
9	10-5-2012	2	2	N/S	Kutaru village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
10	14-5-2012	1	1	N/S	T/Balewa town, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
11	7-6-2012	N/S	N/S	10 houses	Gwaska-Bom village, Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
12	7-7-2012	40	N/S	N/S	Riyom, Riyom LGA	Plateau
13	11-7-2012	4	1	N/S	Dungah-sabo Bogoro LGA	Bauchi
14	2-8-2012	1	N/S	N/S	Gongo village, T/Balewa LGA	Bauchi
15	16-10-2012	30	N/S	N/S	Guma, Guma LGA	Benue
16	18-10-2012	3	N/S	N/S	Kadarko, Giza Dev. Area	Nasarawa

Reported cases in 2013

s/n	Reported date of attack	No. of persons killed	No. of persons injured	Property destroyed	Place(s) of attack	State
1	13-1-2013	20	N/S	-	Guma, Guma LGA	Benue
2	22-1-2013	9	N/S	-	Wadata, Riyom LGA	Plateau
3	30-1-2013	3	N/S	N/S	Amla, Otukpo LGA	Benue
4	30-3-2013	20	N/S	6 houses	Atakar, Kagoro LGA	Kaduna
5	1-4-2013	19	10	-	Mafan Village, Kaura LGA	Kaduna
6	1-4-2013	25	N/S	N/S	Wase Tofa, Turaki, Kanana in Langtang LGA	Plateau
7	5-4-2013	15	N/S	N/S	Rutu, Doma LGA	Nasarawa
8	6-4-2013	13	N/S	N/S	Suwa, Burukutu in L/Lamurde LGA	Adamawa

9	8-4-2013	22	N/S	N/S	Bokkos, Bokko LGA	Plateau
10	14-4-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Uwunde Village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
11	4-5-2013	20	N/S	-	Rukubi, Doma LGA	Nasarawa
12	12-5-2013	45	N/S	-	Ekwo-Agatu, Agatu LGA	Benue
13	2-6-2013	45	N/S	-	Agatu, Agatu LGA	Benue
14	5-6-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Kaambe Village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
15	8-6-2013	1	N/S	Roman Catholic Cattle Farm	Ichama, Okpokwu LGA	Benue
16	8-6-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Kukyor village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
17	10-6-2013	1	N/S	N/S	K/Moyi, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
18	27-6-2013	28	N/S	N/S	Magama, Bongong, Karkashi Villages in Langtang LGA	Plateau
19	1-7-2013	40	N/S	10 houses	Okpanchenyi, Agatu LGA	Benue
20	1-7-2013	30	N/S	-	Randa, near Kwandere, Lafia North Dev. Area	Nasarawa
21	5-7-2013	2	N/S	N/S	Orvanya village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
22	6-7-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Anthony village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
23	2-8-2013	16	N/S	Property worth millions of Naira	Kukudu, Ajo, Tse-Akura in Keana LGA	Nasarawa
24	9-8-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Dooga village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
25	11-8-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Kaambe village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
26	3-9-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Akuntu village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
27	7-9-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Ukaha village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
28	9-9-2013	1	N/S	N/S	Wurji village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
29	9-9-2013	4	N/S	N/S	Gidan Babanyara village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
30	10-9-2013	3	N/S	N/S	Tse-ibi village, Awe LGA	Nasarawa
31	28-9-2013	33	N/S	30 houses	Ojantele, Okpagabi and Ibadan in Agatu LGA	Benue
32	29-9-2013	13	N/S	-	Agatu, Agatu LGA	Benue
33	4-10-2013	3	N/S	-	Ejima, Agatu LGA	Benue
34	12-10-2013	30	N/S	-	Oguchi-Ankpa, Agatu LGA	Benue
35	9-11-2013	85	N/S	200 houses	Ello, Akogani, Ogwulle-Ankpa, Ekwo, Enogaje, Okpanchenyi in Agatu LGA	Benue
36	16-12-2013	-	N/S	-	Tep, Gashaka LGA	Taraba

37	27-12-2013	7	N/S	-	Agasha, Nzorov, Gbajimba in Guma LGA	Benue
38	(?-?-)2013	20	N/S	N/S	Matol and Mangol Villages in Bokkos LGA	Plateau

Reported cases in 2014 (till March)

n/s	Reported Date of attack	No. of persons killed	No. of persons injured	Property destroyed	Place(s) of attack	State
1	3-1-2014	2	N/S	N/S	Jere, Kagarko LGA	Kaduna
2	4-1-2014	5	10	N/S	Marwa, Sabon-Gida, Kaura LGA	Kaduna
3	5-1-2014	4	N/S	N/S	Moro'a, Kaura LGA	Kaduna
4	13-1-2014	20	N/S	N/S	Guma, LGA	Benue
5	19-1-2014	2	N/S	N/S	Adaka, Makurdi LGA	Benue
6	26-1-2014	4	N/S	N/S	Gwasko – Gwagwalada	FCT
7	30-1-2014	7	N/S	N/S	Manyi-Akura, Kaura LGA	Kaduna
8	3-2-2014	32	N/S	N/S	Rajak and Attakar villages in Riyom LGA	Plateau
9	3-2-2014	30	N/S	N/S	Zangan, Zandyem and Azang villages, Kaura LGA	Kaduna
10	6-2-2014	22	N/S	N/S	Maro community, Wase, LGA	Plateau
11	6-2-2014	6	N/S	39 houses	Masu Village, Toundo LGA	Adamawa
12	7-2-2014	1	N/S	N/S	Apir, Makurdi LGA	Benue
13	18-2-2014	10	N/S	N/S	Agyom, Tse-Usende, Tse-Torkula villages in Guma LGA	Benue
14	19-2-2014	2	N/S	N/S	Enger village, Gwer-West LGA	Benue
15	13-2-2014	3	N/S	N/S	Tse-Akpam, Logo LGA	Benue
16	20-2-2014	13	N/S	N/S	Rapyem, Barkin-Ladi LGA	Plateau
17	20-2-2014	8	N/S	N/S	Jimba, Gwer-West LGA	Benue
18	22-2-2014	29	17	N/S	Rakong, Barkin-Ladi LGA	Plateau
19	5-3-2014	20	16	200 houses	Gwon, Gwarama, Gwarim and Torok in Riyom LGA	Plateau
20	6-3-2014	13	N/S	15 houses	Anyibe and Tse-Gbeleve in Logo LGA and Moon in Adikpo LGA	Benue
21	8-3-2014	21	N/S	N/S	Ayilamo, Logo LGA	Benue

22	8-3-2014	10	N/S	N/S	Gishiri Hassan and Kiorkende Villages, Ibi LGA	Taraba
23	14-3-2014	100	N/S	N/S	Ungwar Sankwai, Ungwar Gata and Chenshyi villages, Kaura LGA	Kaduna
24	16-3-2014	35	N/S	N/S	Ikyo, Agwaza, Azer, Lijam, Tse – Saka villages in Takum LGA	Taraba
25	17-3-2014	20	N/S	N/S	Agasha, Guma LGA	Benue
26	23-3-2014	55	N/S	N/S	Gbajimba, Guma LGA	Benue
27	23-3-2014	7	N/S	N/S	Ibuwa, Ibi LGA	Taraba
28	25-3-2014	20	N/S	N/S	Agena village, Gwer LGA	Benue
29	26-3-2014	9	N/S	N/S	Vingir village, Takum LGA	Taraba

Chapter Four: Understanding the non-Boko Haram violent conflict in the Middle Belt region

How is the ongoing violent conflict in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria to be understood? Why are Christians mostly the targets and victims? Public discourse amongst commentators in northern Nigeria appears to limit the violent conflict to environmental degradation, migration and competition over economic opportunities. The Middle Belt region is deeply divided between indigenous Christian communities and settler communities that are mostly permanent Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers or Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. Attacks on these indigenous communities are automatically an attack against Christian communities. This has been ongoing, sometimes with states enacting policies that support the Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen against the Christian indigenous communities, with the intent to expand Islamic domination. The research shifts the debate away from the issue of environment and migration to analyze the Islamic legacy of domination through *darul Islam*, and how colonial (1903-1960) and post-military Nigerian politics (1999-2014) sustained this legacy, making the Christians of the Middle Belt region victims.

Ongoing discourse in Nigeria: Environment, migration and economic competition

Overwhelming public opinion in northern Nigeria seems to suggest that the on-going non-Boko Haram violence in the Middle Belt region is due to environmental degradation, migration and contestation over economic opportunities. Gudaku notes that ‘the environment controls man by forcing him to adapt. However, when adaptation is impossible, the only option is to flee’ [81]. Northern Nigeria lies on the edge of the Sahara desert. It has a semi-arid climate with a scanty savannah belt, different and distinct from the environmental features of southern Nigeria, which has plenty of vegetation. Over the years, the Lake Chad Basin, considered one of Africa’s largest, covering an average area of 22,000 square kilometers, today represents the ‘diminished remains’ and a skeletal shadow of itself [82]. This has pushed many migrants to cross the border from Chad, Niger and Cameroon into northern Nigeria, settling in cities such as Kano, Maiduguri, Sokoto and Katsina. Incidentally, these northern cities too have serious environmental problems ranging from desert encroachment, shortage of water and soil erosion. Municipal waste disposal is also becoming a serious problem especially in Borno’s capital city of Maiduguri [83].

With the transfer of Nigeria’s capital from Lagos to Abuja, which is also within the Middle Belt region, business enclaves and settlements sprang up close to Abuja, in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Plateau states. Eventually, these settlements took on permanent patterns alongside economic expansion. Indigenous Christian communities were threatened, and under the banner of indigenes against settlers, the indigenous communities vehemently resented the economic domination of Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers. As a result, land and boundary disputes erupted in 1989 between the Tiv and the Fulani which saw thousands of people, mostly Christians, killed. Again, tensions between ethnic Beroms and Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers erupted in 1997 over farmland. Additionally, there were the Zango Kataf conflicts in 1984 and 1992, and there were disputes between the Bachama and the Hausa-Fulani Muslim settler communities in 1989 [84]. In all these conflicts, Christians were killed and their lands taken over. In this context, Christians are victims not simply because of contest over environmental

resources such as land and grazing. Rather, they are victims because of a strategy to implement the Islamic policy of dominating and ruling over Christian and non-Muslim territories. They are also victims because of the effort to sustain the colonial legacy that gave undue advantage to the Hausa-Fulani Muslim hegemony over the Middle Belt region. Thus ensuring that the Middle Belt region coming under Islamic law remains a goal for the Hausa-Fulani Muslim oligarchy.

Darul Islam and the quest to dominate the Middle Belt region in Nigeria's political history

Ferguson explains that from the outset, 'Islam divided the world between *dar-al-Islam*, the house of Islam, and *dar-al-harb*, the house of war. The first is composed of Muslims and those submissive to Islamic rule. The second is the realm of infidels' [85]. The two houses are in a constant state of war, which the house of Islam will eventually win through jihad. Jihad literally means 'effort, striving or struggle' [86]. In the course of Islamic history, jihad has come to mean two things, first, the 'struggle against the invisible enemy, the devil or one's self (*nafs*)', second, 'jihad has come to mean fighting the *other*, often of non-Islamic faith or one whose faith is considered diluted, in the name of Allah, where a fighter who lays down his life for the course of Allah is promised instant immortality' [87]. According to Ahmad, it is the waging of 'holy war' against disbelievers, to convert them to Islam, or to kill them [88]. Therefore, politically motivated jihad, embedded in Islamic religion, also uses Islamic religion as its springboard to instigate a biased world outlook, conquering territories for Islam and for Allah. On this basis, different strategies were adopted by Islamic jihad: political policies, the infiltration of traditional institutions, economic migration etc., all intended to dominate, conquer and take over the Middle Belt region. Before the arrival of the British colonial administration in Nigeria, Usman Dan Fodio, a Fulani radical Islamic scholar began an Islamic jihad in Gobir in 1804, and by 1808 had established the Sokoto Caliphate, moving towards the Middle Belt region to conquer the area and bring it under the house of Islam [89]. In fact, he had penetrated the western Middle Belt for an onward march to the Yoruba lands. It was rumored that the intent was to go as far as the Atlantic Ocean in order to dip the Quran into the ocean as a sign of victory. However, most parts of the Middle Belt, particularly the Bachama of Adamawa, the indigenous communities of southern Kaduna, Zar (Sayawa) of Bauchi, the people of Plateau, Nasarawa and Benue states remained unconquered and still demonstrate palpable repugnance towards Islam that the jihad was to establish. The area was one in which the mission of jihad was unaccomplished, to the frustration of the Sokoto Caliphate and associates.

By the time Great Britain established complete colonial control over Nigeria, Islam was firmly established in most parts of northern Nigeria except the Middle Belt region. Another attempt to penetrate the Middle Belt region by the Hausa-Fulani Muslims came via the colonial administration. In 1906, the colonial administration established the Royal Niger Company in Abinsi, in the heart of Benue state. However, most of the indigenous workers employed were the Hausa-Fulani Muslims who served as interpreters, merchants and servants to the colonial agents. A combined force of the Tiv and the Jukun militia attacked and killed over 67 Hausa-Fulani Muslims and had over 113 taken as captives. The attack 'was to uproot the hundreds of Hausa-Fulani Muslim traders, merchants and auxiliaries that had been imported to the station

and had formed, through their association with the British chartered company, a visible underclass of colonial collaborators who were also propagating Islam; the religion that the Middle Belt populace had fought against during Othman Danfodio's Jihad' [90] To this extent, it is obvious that the attack was directed essentially at the Hausa-Fulani Muslims and indeed Islam. The reason is not unconnected with the severe antagonism that existed between the Hausa-Fulani Muslims and the Christian farmers in the Middle Belt. The British applied certain policies that left Nigeria weak and divided along religious and ethnic lines and gave undue advantage to the Hausa-Fulani Muslims [91]. These policies were sustained by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim oligarchy that took over northern Nigeria when the British left. For instance, the *sabon-gari* model, meaning migrant quarters or market, was created specifically to accommodate southern Christians living in northern Nigeria. The second model is the *tudun-wada*, meaning hill of Wada, which was created to accommodate northern Christians mostly from the Middle Belt region. The idea was not just to keep the non-Muslims away from the Muslim territories. It was also to ensure that the non-Muslims did not benefit from the social amenities that were available [92]. In 1949, a group of northern and Middle Belt Christians living in Tudun Wada area of Zaria (city in Kaduna) asked the Zaria Native Authority permission to build a church in Tudun Wada so as to relieve their wives and children of the strenuous journey of walking every Sunday to Wusasa. The request was rejected. However, a petition went to London about which nothing was done [93]. Again, the colonialists established native authority systems and in some communities, such as Ganye, Michika etc., Muslim rulers were imposed on indigenous Christian groups [94].

Again, the Hausa-Fulani ruling class made the Hausa language the most dominant in the Middle Belt region and had a clear strategy to make Islam the official religion as well. In this context, there was forceful conversion of prominent Christians, sometimes through enticement with political offices. For instance, Alhaji Yahya Kwande, a prominent Christian from Plateau State, converted to Islam and joined the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC). 'The NPC was the enemy we knew. We could only fight for our rights within the system. Communication was only in Hausa and Hausa was the main language of the north, therefore some of us believed that our presence could counter the Hausa-Fulani control' [95]. Christian chiefs were made third-class chiefs and only Muslim chiefs were promoted to second- or first-class chiefs. For instance, the emir of Wase, a Muslim Fulani chief of a small migrant Muslim majority community in Plateau state, is second class, while the Chief of Shendam, a non-Fulani Christian ruling over a bigger indigenous community was made a third-class chief [96]. The legacy also gave undue advantage to the Hausa-Fulani Muslims of Northern Nigeria [97]. They created Sharia courts, appointed a council of chiefs, mostly emirs who were Muslims, some over indigenous Christian and traditionalist groups in the Middle Belt region. For instance, some of the indigenous emirs had to convert from Christianity to Islam if they wanted to rule over their ethnic groups, and even become a first-class chief. A typical example is the present Emir of Ganye, in Southern Adamawa state. He was a Christian Catholic, but had to convert to Islam in order to become an emir (addressed as Gangwari Ganye), although most of the people in his chiefdom are Christians. According to Paden, Islamic courts were handling more than 75% of cases in northern Nigeria, in civil, criminal and family matters [98].

Further field research indicates that the preference of Muslims as traditional rulers is predicated on the wisdom of the principle of: *Cuius regio, eius religio* (Whose realm, his religion), which means the religion of the ruler dictated the religion of the ruled. Following the spirit of this principle, the Muslims backed the colonial government and have always ensured that Muslims emerged as traditional rulers in most parts of the Middle Belt. Christians and votaries of African Traditional Religion are not favored in contesting traditional rulership. Where they insist and are even elected, they are not appointed because they are not likely to use their influence in the context of *Cuius regio, eius religio* to propagate Islam. In Agwatashi, Obi local government area of Nasarawa state, the traditional ruler died and in pursuance of the selection of the new traditional ruler, six of the seven king-makers voted for Peter Ashiki, who is a Christian, and Umar Abubakar Apeshi, a Muslim, got one vote. However, the government of Nasarawa state under the leadership of Muslim governor Aliyu Akwe Doma still crowned the Umar who got only one vote as the *Osoho* of *Olusoho*-Agwatashi to the dismay of the people and Peter who was chosen. Similarly, in Alosi (Obi local government area), when the *Oseshi* of Alosi, Solomon Obiokpa died, his son who was the heir to throne was denied his birth right for no other reason than his faith, which the current conspiracy to propagate Islam using the principle of *Cuius regio, eius religio* is totally against. In his place, a Muslim, Usman Aye was appointed and turbaned as the *Oseshi* of Alosi. In Farin-Ruwa Development Area of Nasarawa state that borders Bokkos local government area of Plateau state, the stool of the paramount ruler, the *Gom Mama* erected in 1998 seems to be a special preserve of the Muslims. Due to the sensitive nature of religion in Nigeria, our informant, who declined to be mentioned, revealed that there are 22 king-makers, 11 from the Arum ethnic group and 11 also from the Kantana ethnic group that make up the Farin-Ruwa Development Area. NCSAN's informant explained that of the 22 king-makers, Christians are about 70% but are not allowed to choose a Christian for the stool of *Gom Mama*. In Zing local government area of Taraba state, the principle of *Cuius regio, eius religio* is rife. And to achieve this by all means, imposition of Muslim traditional rulers is said to be the order of the day. For instance, the paramount ruler of Zing – the *Kpanti* Zing – has imposed four Muslims on the people as district heads out of the seven newly created districts as lamented by Kalako Luka. He regrets that in Mazing District, one Muslim, Danlami Ibrahim Sambo whose village (kwana) is not even within the jurisdiction of the new district is appointed as the new district head. According to Kalako Luka, this is the most brazen form of impunity, expressed by *Kpanti's* fiat and imposition.

Reliable sources in Zing reported that the action of *Kpanti* Zing angered the people to the extent that they took to the streets in peaceful protest but their protest has not yielded the desired results yet. Before this incident, an informant who would not want his name to be mentioned disclosed to NCSAN that in Kakulu, a suburb of Zing town, a Muslim called Alhaji Sale Nyatoba was forced on the people as the *kpanti* Kakulu rather than the popular and selected candidate in the person of Donatus Nyameh. There are indications that areas such as Lau, Karim-Lamido, Bali and Gassol local government of Taraba state are not devoid of these problems. Southern Kaduna too is facing these same challenges just as some parts of Adamawa state are. In Bazza in Michika local government area of Adamawa state, the Christian elected district head was rejected by Government not on account of any reason other than faith. In his place, a Muslim is installed. In executing the principle of *Cuius regio, eius religio*, the huge Christian population in the affected place is considered immaterial. Already in the

dying days of colonial rule in Nigeria, when Sir. Ahmadu Bello was the premier of the northern region (Northern Regional Government) from 1954 to 1966, a special arrangement was made between the Northern Regional Government and the West African Airways Corporation to fly northern Muslims who wish to undertake pilgrimage directly to Mecca [99]. The same government appointed three representatives to assist northern Muslim pilgrims at Kano airport with issues of passports, visas and immigration [100]. The northern ministry of education appointed an 'Organizer for Arabic Studies'; a director specifically chosen by the government to organize local and overseas studies of Arabic and Islamic studies for Muslim students, with an 18-month scholarship in Sharia studies at the University of Khartoum [101]. The then Premier of northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello addressed the heads of Protestant missions in Jos on the need for Christians and Muslims to collaborate in providing quality education for the northern region. Despite this address, a northern government effort to expand training colleges excluded the Middle Belt region. Christian missionaries were free to teach the Christian faith in the Middle Belt region but were not allowed to do the same within the Hausa-Fulani Muslim territories without the permission of the emir concerned [102]. By the time of the military era, the discrimination against Middle Belt Christians had grown tremendously. The military dictators were mostly Hausa-Fulani Muslims, Buhari, Babangida and Abacha. Their closest rivals were Middle Belt Christian military officers such as General Domkat Bali. Additionally, in order to stave off further coups and ensure the survival of the Muslim generals in power, they manipulated religious sentiments in the handling of state affairs both within the military institution and the civil society [103]. As such, they pampered loyal members of their religious group through accelerated promotions, political appointments and special welfare packages [104]. They filled the military ranks with officers from their Hausa-Fulani Muslim stock while targeting other ethnic groups for surveillance and repression [105]. For example, the demand for an emirate with an appointed emir by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim community in Jos was almost realized when General Babangida created Jos North Local Government and was poised to establish an emirate for them until the indigenous Christian groups, the Afizere, Anaguta and Berom violently protested against it in 1994 [106], and the protest continues to this day.

As a result of these policies, different resistance groups were formed by some of the indigenous Christian communities, against Hausa-Fulani Muslim imperialism and domination. Such groups include the Berom Progressive Movement of 1938, formed at Rahol Kanang, in Jos, Plateau state. Others include the Tiv Progressive Union, Wurukum Tribal Union, the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC), the Northern Non-Muslim League (NNML) and the Middle Zonal League (MZL) [107]. It is important to stress that the objective of the Non-Muslim League was the protection of the religion and customs of Christians and other non-Muslim groups of the north [108]. The Middle Zonal League was also 'an expression of shared hostility among the Middle Belters against the emirates' [109]. The Middle Zonal League and the Middle Belt Party merged to form the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC) that confronted the Hausa-Fulani Muslim domination of the Middle Belt region. The Middle Belt as a region came to symbolize the struggle of indigenous Christian groups that have been oppressed by the Hausa-Fulani Muslim rulers of the far North. But then, Islam as a religion and Muslims as a group have not given up the effort to spread *darul Islam*, conquer the Middle Belt and ensure that Sharia law rules. In this context, the non-Boko Haram violent conflict is not all about environment and

migration. The violence should be seen in the light of Hausa-Fulani Muslim efforts to expand the *darul Islam* and conquer the Middle Belt region.

Under the shadow of Boko Haram, *darul Islam* and non-Boko Haram violence

Nigeria return to multiparty democracy in 1999, and the subsequent emergence of Boko Haram, which revived the *darul Islam* and jihadi principles, inspired the non-Boko Haram violence that eventually targeted Christians of the Middle Belt region. First, Ahmed Sani, the former Zamfara state governor, took advantage of a loosely crafted clause in the constitution [110] and declared his state of Zamfara a Sharia state. By the year 2000, twelve out of the nineteen northern states had declared Sharia law, with other Hausa-Fulani Muslim settler communities in the Middle Belt region also asking for Sharia law [111]. Furthermore, Islamic organizations began to claim ownership of public spaces in university campuses, markets and communities. For instance, the Miss World 2002 riots began in Kaduna because some Muslim groups protested against the event, as they claimed it was polluting an Islamic religious space. But the protests quickly turned into riots directed against Christian communities [112]. Another incident was in Jos in 2001 when a lady who was allegedly dressed in a manner that exposed parts of her body tried to pass through a barricade mounted by Muslims during Friday prayers. She was prevented from passing and then attacked, leading to violent attacks against Christians and churches [113].

Boko Haram emerged in Borno and Yobe states around 2002, the sect leaders specifically threatened to eradicate Christianity from the Middle Belt region through a campaign of violence against Christians and churches. In 2012 alone, it carried out more than 19 suicide attacks on Christians and churches, mostly in the Middle Belt region [114]. With fluency and sophistication, the terrorist and clandestine nature of Boko Haram led to attacks on churches, Christian homes and shops, particularly in Kaduna, Plateau and Taraba states. For example, in May 2014, two explosions rocked a crowded market in Jos, leaving 118 people dead, who were mostly Christians [115]. Events such as these are important for two reasons: first, they tell us that northern Nigeria is not a united political entity as observers want us to believe. Second, while the Middle Belt region has succeeded in keeping its Christian identity, it equally failed to keep out the Hausa-Fulani Muslim's desire to conquer the region and bring it under the *darul Islam*. The *darul Islam* is spread using various means. While Boko Haram violence was going on, it also inspired the non-Boko Haram violent attacks carried out by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen against indigenous Christian communities in Benue, Kaduna, Nasarawa, Taraba and southern Adamawa States. Most of the non-Boko Haram attacks became intense after Shekau released a video message calling on all Muslims to attack Christians and Nigerians who are followers of the West wherever they may be. 'Nigerians let me let you know that you are in serious disaster. Don't think we are northerners, because you are misunderstanding the whole thing. Let me make it crystal clear to you to save you from unnecessary distorted newspaper and radio analyses on the issues you don't understand. My brethren, wherever you are, in Abuja, Lagos, or the South-South, wherever you are to commence attacks. Even as individuals, take up your swords and slaughter anyone you come across in his sleep' [116]. As a result of this message, attacks carried out by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen against Christian

communities led to Christian homes being destroyed alongside churches, schools, farms and medical facilities.

These attacks took different forms, first, under the cover of environmental and migratory factors, the Hausa-Fulani Muslim settler communities that have again sprung up in different parts of the Middle Belt region took up arms against many Christian communities. For the Christians living in the Middle Belt region of Nigeria, these settlements are an extension of the hegemonic Hausa-Fulani Muslim oligarchy from the far North, which had dominated Nigerian politics to the detriment of other indigenous tribes of northern and central Nigeria. These Hausa-Fulani Muslim communities represent an apparent plot to dominate the Middle Belt region of Nigeria and bring it under the 'house of Islam'. First of all, these communities cling to Islam, the religions of their places of origins, thus conferring on themselves a religious identity distinct from that of the Christian host communities. They also try to dominate the Christian communities by demanding separate emirates for the Hausa-Fulani settler communities, for example in Jos North and Nasarawa Eggon. Furthermore, they insist that only those who are Muslims can become traditional rulers. This has resulted in the various violent conflicts tabulated above. That is why a resident of Abuja says, 'from my personal experience and knowledge of the geography of northern Nigeria, it cannot be said that all the Muslim-Fulani nomads in the Middle Belt are environmental refugees...the Muslim-Fulani herder has a common agenda of animating the Jihadist mission as it was in the eighteenth century' [117]. Following from this, the ideology and activities of Boko Haram became a perfect opportunity for this agenda to be executed. The conflict of Boko Haram shifted government's attention away from other conflicts to the atrocities of Boko Haram. This provided a fertile environment for other conflicts to occur. As such, since the Boko Haram violent uprising, we have seen a massive increase in Hausa-Fulani Muslim attacks against indigenous Christian communities. From the evidence presented it is reasonable to assume that the desire to dominate and control non-Muslim territories is continuing.

Another strategy to infiltrate and dominate the Middle Belt region under the shadow of Boko Haram became serious when road signs and signposts around major towns in the Middle Belt region, especially Bauchi, Gombe and parts of Adamawa state began to appear in Arabic. Flyers were also dropped in some towns and villages before attacks were carried out by Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. The Hausa-Fulani Muslim settlers began to contest their identity of 'settlership' and claim they are indigenes. They use sophisticated weapons, choose their targets with precision and accuracy and ensure that only Christian communities are targeted. A member of the Federal House of Representatives from Katsina state argued that the attackers can be rightly and justifiably described as terrorists due to the nature of the havoc caused [118]. The attackers are alleged to be herdsmen, so it is reasonable to question where they get their weapons, and if truly these herdsmen are without an agenda to Islamize the Middle Belt region. The sophisticated weapons used and the manner in which they are used demonstrate that the attackers must have received adequate funding and training. Weapons and arsenal at the attackers' disposal include sophisticated rifles, AK-47s and Kalashnikovs. In fact, Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen are alleged to have hired trained mercenaries and assassins from foreign countries such as Cameroon, Chad, Mali and Niger who move into the country armed with AK-47s and other high-calibre military assault rifles to invade and attack unprotected

farming communities. With these killings and sophisticated weapons, it appears to demonstrate that there is a strategy and a calculated attempt to dominate the Middle Belt region.

Concluding remarks

In trying to understand why Christians are the victims of the non-Boko Haram violence, the research concedes that environmental degradation might have played a role in forcing Hausa-Fulani Muslims to migrate to the Middle Belt region, which has richer environmental resources. However, this role is very limited in inspiring the violent conflict. The ultimate reason for the conflict appears to be the drive by expansionist Islamic policy to dominate the Middle Belt region. First, the nature of the conflict seems to follow the historical pattern where the Hausa-Fulani Muslim oligarchy has used colonial legacies, political policies and religious sentiments in order to conquer and dominate the Middle Belt region. The Hausa-Fulani Muslims appear to deploy the financial and economic power at their disposal in executing this war. In recent times, questions have been asked about the role rich Hausa-Fulani Muslim politicians play in all these conflicts. For instance, it is no secret that allegations have been made about authorities selling arms to militant groups, allegations that have remained uninvestigated for a long time. When General Malu, the then Chief of Army Staff was sacked in 2002 and the appointment of Ihejirika as army chief was made, a special investigation panel of the army, according to reports of the panel published in Sahara reporters' website several years ago, had established that there had been a massive theft of arms and ammunition from the army's armory in Kaduna. These arms and ammunitions were reportedly sold to the Niger Delta militants in a deal allegedly financed by some top politicians [119].

Looking at the sophisticated weapons and ammunitions used by these Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen, in addition to the fact recent allegations link some politicians and military generals to Boko Haram sponsorship, could one be wrong to assume that they too have sponsors within the political class? Again, there are moves by the governments of Adamawa, Kaduna, Nasarawa and Taraba states to establish and gazette grazing fields for Hausa-Fulani Muslim herdsmen. This means that swaths of land from indigenous Christian communities will be taken away for that purpose, depriving Christians of their land. It is therefore reasonable to argue that the conflict is more about the historical drive of Islam to conquer and dominate the Christian Middle Belt region. No wonder, Dr. Bala Takaya, vice-president of Nigeria's Middle Belt Forum and former head of the Department of Political Science at the University of Jos, speaking to the media in Abuja said, 'the minorities in Muslim-majority northern Nigeria had been oppressed and held back both by the Fulani Islamic elite and, until independence in 1960, by the British colonial masters. But now better education, increased consciousness and hard-won political experience has resulted in the grassroots growth of a "Middle Belt" identity, separate from the dominant Hausa-Fulani Muslim culture. The yoke is broken and the shackles are being thrown off. The time is now' [120].

Although there is no evidence to suggest that there exists a contemporary "grand design", deliberately conceived to Islamize the whole of the middle Belt Region, the level of atrocities against Christians, the choice of targets and the ideology that accompanies these atrocities shows that the Dan Fodio agenda to Islamize Nigeria even before the arrival of the British is

still in play. It also indicates that this strategy, though not fulfilled by official conventional resistant groups, is carried out by informal sects, groups and proxies probably with the tacit support of influential figures in Northern Nigeria.

Number of people interviewed in different states

The interviews were conducted with different categories of people considered as “victims” or “witnesses” in all the states under consideration. There was no distinction in gender, class, religion, ethnicity or political affiliation. Unfortunately, it was not possible to interview those considered as “perpetrators” either suspected, arrested or in custody to hear their own side of the story. Again, for ethical and security reasons, the names of those interviewed cannot be published in this report.

State	Number of people interviewed	Period of interviews
Kaduna State	35	28 June – 2 July 2014
Benue State	70	9 – 15 July 2014
Taraba State	65	16 -20 July 2014
Nasarawa State	50	25 July – 5 August 2014
Other Northern States	150 – Bauchi alone about 70 people	October 2013 – August 2014

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