

FREEDOM OF RELIGION & BELIEF IN NIGERIA:

A SURVEY



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ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The Final Report of the Survey on the Violations of the Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) in Nigeria was developed by the National Human Rights Commission, in partnership with the Kukah Centre and NASFAT with support from The King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue. The survey was conducted in six states – Plateau, Kano, Ebonyi, Osun, Edo and Sokoto – led by Mr. Stephen Klantzama with the support of data collectors and local mobilisers from across the states. The initial draft of the survey report was validated internally and externally by a group of seasoned experts. The project team remains grateful to the experts, partners, researchers, data collectors and all those who contributed to the results achieved by this survey.

Introduction

Nigeria is a country known for its rich cultural diversity and complex socio-political landscape. This diversity presents opportunities for human capital development, but also some sociological challenges related to the freedom of association and expression. One of the concerning issues Nigeria has been grappling with in recent years is the violation of freedom of religion and belief. The freedom of religion and belief is a fundamental human right, as enshrined in Nigeria's Constitution and various international agreements. However, the country has been experiencing a disturbing trend of religious discrimination and persecution that threatens the stability and harmony of its citizens. It is crucial to acknowledge the religious diversity in Nigeria. The country has a significant Christian population in the south and predominant Muslim communities in the north. This religious and cultural tapestry has historically been a source of cultural richness, but it has also led to deep-seated tensions, particularly in regions where different faiths intersect. Such diversity, when not managed with care, can sometimes be a breeding ground for religious intolerance and discrimination.

Furthermore, the rise of extremist groups like Boko Haram and ISWAP in the northern part of Nigeria has aggravated the status of religious violations. Their emergence and sustained attacks have resulted in countless acts of violence against citizens - both Muslims and Christians. Often, these acts of violence are carried out under the banner of religious ideology, exploiting, and distorting religious beliefs to justify acts of terror. Consequently, this situation has created an atmosphere of fear and distrust within communities, making it increasingly difficult for individuals to practice their faith without threat or intimidation.

There are concerns about the lack of effective legal protections for freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. Although the Nigerian constitution guarantees religious freedom, its enforcement remains a challenge. The ramifications of the violations of religion and belief go beyond individual suffering and extend to the social fabric of the nation and its international standing. A comprehensive approach is required to address this pressing problem, one which involves legal reforms, interfaith dialogue, and international cooperation.

Overall, Nigeria is inherently a mosaic of diversities. With a population of over 200 million, 250 ethnic groups, about 400 languages across the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory, and broadly divided into six geopolitical zones, there is a need to create a social and political atmosphere that promotes the practice of religion in accordance with the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Nigeria has a dynamic population mix of Christians and Muslims with over 200 million people. Out of this number, 46.9 per cent are Christians, 51.1 per cent are Muslims, and the remaining 2 per cent represent other faiths or no religion at all (Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project: 2020).

Violations of freedom of religion and beliefs are presented in diverse ways as the bane of Nigeria's socio-political and economic development. Known to be Africa's most populous, Nigeria is a conglomeration of diverse ethnic and religious groups bound with the chord of allegiance to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and the sovereignty of the state. Thus, Nigeria guarantees its citizens the right to freedom of religion as one of the fundamental rights in the Constitution. Particularly, Section 38 of the 1999 Constitution (as amended) states that:

1. Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice, and observance.
2. No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction, ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or a religion not approved by his parent or guardian.

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

However, section 45(1) of the 1999 Constitution provides a caveat that 'Nothing in sections 37, 38, 39, 40 and 41 of this Constitution shall invalidate any law that:

(a) in the interest of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health, or (b) for the purpose of protecting the rights and freedom of other persons.

Thus, Nigeria's constitution as a democratic country provides that no one has the right to demand the adoption of one's religion as the official religion of 'the government of the Federation or of a State.

It also provides that citizens of Nigeria must exercise their rights in a manner that is consistent with the supremacy of the Constitution. Adherence to these guiding principles is possible when citizens are knowledgeable of these fundamental issues. Ignorance of these issues results in possible violations of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria.

This Section of the Constitution accedes to various international legal instruments for the protection of religious freedom at the United Nations and regional levels such as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and Article 8 of the African Charter on Human and People's Rights. Against this background, the National Human Rights Commission in collaboration with The Kukah Centre and Nasrul-Lahi-il Fathi Society of (NASFAT) conducted a survey on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Nigeria to identify enabling factors that promote violations, identify gaps, and develop mechanisms that can promote social cohesion in Nigeria.

Freedom of Religion and Belief in Nigeria: A Review

The concept of freedom of religion and belief is deeply rooted in the idles and principles of democracy which allows citizens of a country to practice their beliefs and express their faith. In a bid to make sense of what freedom and religion are, there are several scholarly opinions and postulations of what freedom of religion and belief entails in a democratic setting. The nexus between religion and democracy in Nigeria is so tight that they can hardly be discussed in isolation.

Talking about Nigerian democracy means assessing the extent to which a conducive environment is created by the state for citizens to express themselves and for ideas, belief systems and worldviews to thrive in line with constitutional provisions. For this reason, (Peter, 2015) opines that sociologically, religion cannot exist in isolation from any human society; hence democracy and religion are recognized in human society as social things. Nigeria, though it is constitutionally recognized as a 'secular' state, religion has continued to play vital roles in its governance.

The way people or authorities understand

the concept of freedom of religion in all its aspects tends to influence its protection by the law of such society. Furthermore, (Egwu, 2001) views freedom of religion and belief as the notion that people of religion can freely partake in the practices of their religion without opposition. This implies that there is a violation of this freedom of religion when there is opposition from another party (in this case, a group or individuals).

However, there is a difference between theory and practice when it comes to freedom of Religion and belief in Nigeria. This is directly linked to the relationship between Nigeria (the state) and religion. What then is the relationship between the state and religion as far as Nigeria is concerned? Ahmed Garba (2016) opines that there is a hybrid version of religion-state patterns in Nigeria such that states in Nigeria show favouritism to the dominant religions of Islam and Christianity in such a way that, where the state is predominantly Muslim, it favours Islam; and where it is predominantly Christian, it favors Christianity.

This is why there are divergent views among the two major religions in terms of the relationship between religion and the state. In this regard, many Christians argue for the separation of the Nigerian state from religion, but some Muslims advocate the fusion of religion, the state and the (sharia) law as it ought to govern the totality of the life of a Muslim from cradle to grave.

Such competing ideologies expose the complex nature of religious freedom in Nigeria, giving rise to several human rights issues that can be expounded through


the lens of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. It forms the basis of the extent to which the citizens (Christians and Muslims alike) adhere to or violate the freedom of religion and beliefs of other citizens in Nigeria. This is the crux of this survey; to ascertain the level and degree of violations and compliance of these constitutional rights in some selected states.

Statement of the Problem

The increasing prevalence of violations of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria has been a major concern in Nigeria. Despite the availability of legal provisions that guarantee this fundamental human right and structure, Nigeria has witnessed the infringement of this citizen's right. Thus, this survey is one of the many endeavours which seek to identify the dynamics associated with the violations of religious freedom and the potential challenges faced by individuals in practising their religion or belief. It seeks to investigate the prevalence of discrimination, violence, and other obstacles hindering the exercise of religious freedom, as well as the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional mechanisms in safeguarding this fundamental human right.

Aim and Objectives of the Survey

The aim of the survey on Freedom of Religion and Belief in Nigeria is to assess the state of religious freedom in the country and identify challenges or areas for improvement. Within this thrust, the survey has the following specifics:

-  To understand the extent to which citizens' freedom and rights to practice their religion or belief system are respected and/or violated.

- ✔ To assess public attitudes towards religious diversity and tolerance in Nigeria.
- ✔ To identify instances of religious discrimination or violence.
- ✔ To evaluate the effectiveness of existing legal and institutional frameworks protecting religious freedom.
- ✔ To contribute to existing policy and advocacy efforts aimed at promoting religious freedom and interfaith harmony in Nigeria.

Methodology

This study adopted a mixed methodology approach to collect data, i.e., combining both quantitative and qualitative tools to collect data from respondents. The quantitative data was collected using a structured survey questionnaire, while qualitative data was collected through in-depth interviews with key informants. To ensure wide-spread and representative sampling across Southern and Northern regions of Nigeria, six hundred and seven (607) responses were received from Kano, Plateau, Sokoto, Ebonyi, Osun, and Edo. Thirty-six (36) key informant interviews (KII) in these states were conducted. The rationale behind the selection of these states is to ensure a nearly equal response from states predominately occupied by Christian majority and other states occupied by Muslim majority. Furthermore, these states were selected on the basis of the level of interreligious intolerance existing in the states, as well as the influence of partners with local faith-based organisations in the states.

Demography Information

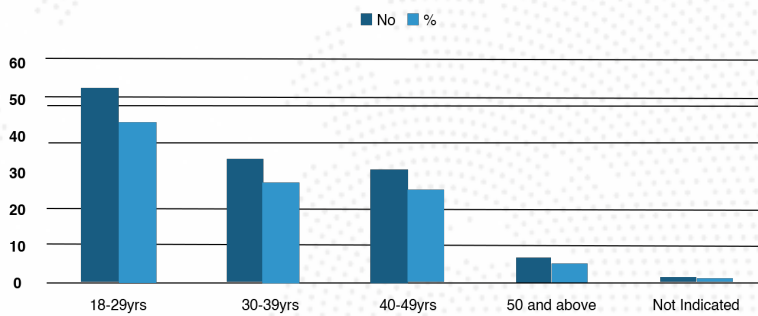
Kano

Kano, a state located in the northwest region of Nigeria, is recognized as one of the most populous and historically significant states in the country. The state's population comprises of a diverse array of ethnic groups including Hausa-Fulani, Kanuri, and others. Due to its rich cultural heritage, traditional crafts, and bustling markets, Kano has become a popular destination for tourists and traders alike. Furthermore, the state has been a host to different ethnic groups like the Igbos who migrated for trade.

Population dynamics in Kano are driven by urbanization and migration. The state capital, Kano City, which is a significant commercial and industrial hub, attracts people from different regions seeking economic opportunities. The city’s population is predominately Muslim, with Islamic traditions and practices playing a significant role in shaping the social and cultural fabric of the state.

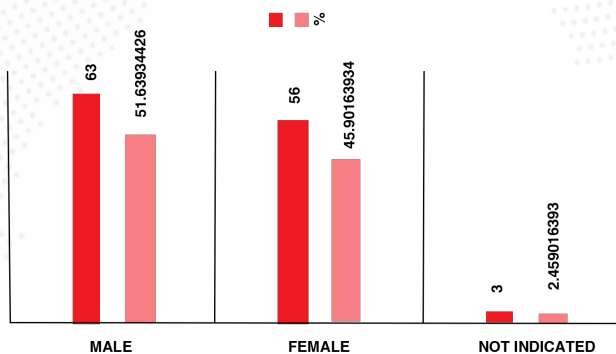
Kano offers a unique blend of cultural and economic opportunities that have attracted people from different regions. The state’s rich cultural heritage and traditional crafts, combined with the vibrant markets, make it an ideal destination for tourism and trade.

Age Distribution of Respondents

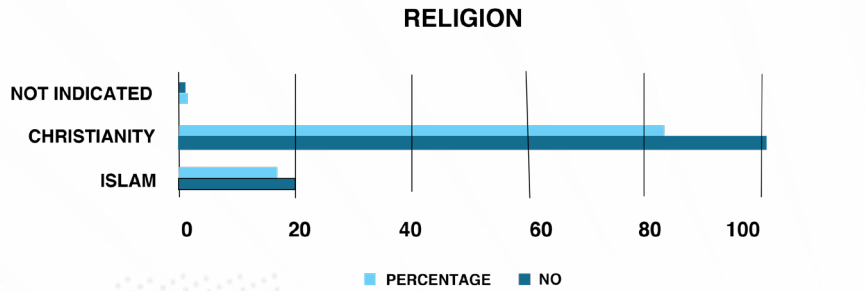


Out of a total of 122 responses received from this state, 42.6% responses were received from respondents between the ages of 18-29. Respondents between the ages of 50 years and above were approximately 5%.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



Out of 122 respondents, 63 (51.6%) were male, 56 (46%) were female. 3 respondents did not indicate their gender.

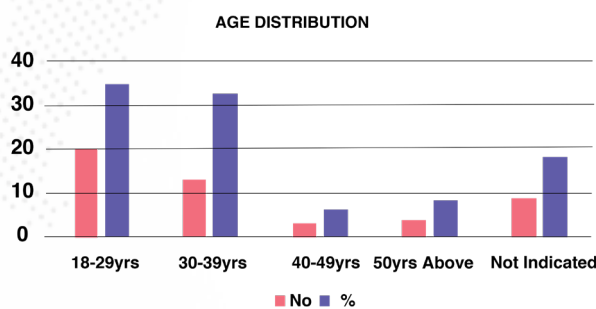


Because Kano is a predominant Muslim state, responses were targeted at Christians to understand the context of Freedom of Religion and belief from a religious minority group perspective. Thus 101 responses were received from Christians, and 20 responses from Muslims. 1 respondent didn't indicate his/her religion.

Sokoto

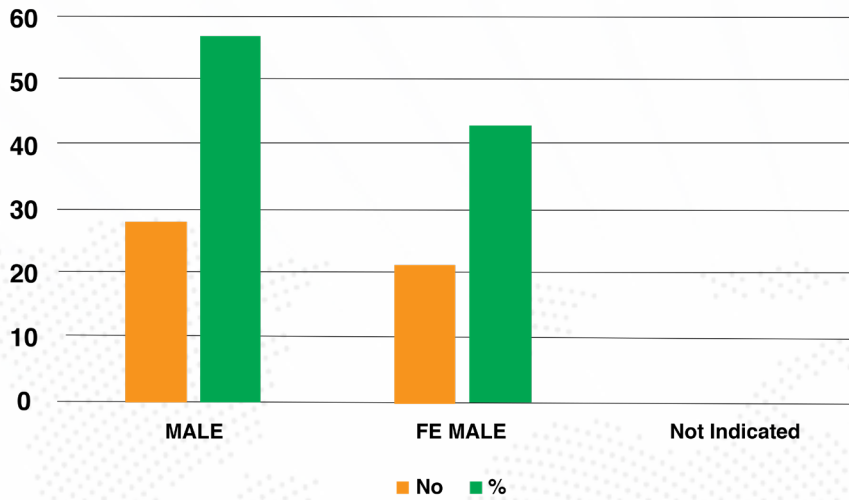
Sokoto state is known for its rich cultural heritage and its historical significance in the formation of Northern Nigeria. The state has strong Islamic influence, being the seat of the Sultan of Sokoto, the spiritual leader of Muslims in Nigeria. Sokoto State is characterized by a predominantly Hausa-Fulani population, contributing to a vibrant tapestry of traditions and customs. Agriculture plays a pivotal role in the state's economy, with crops like millet and sorghum being major staples. The state is also home to various traditional crafts, including intricate leatherwork and weaving.

Historically, Sokoto was a key centre of the Sokoto Caliphate, a powerful Islamic state in the 19th century. Today, remnants of this historical significance can be explored through landmarks such as the Sultan's Palace and the Usmanu Dan Fodio University.



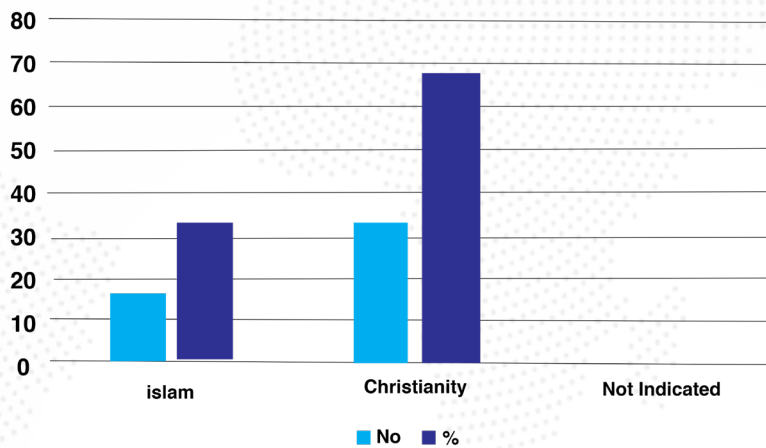
A total of 49 responses were received from the state. 20 responses (34.6%) were received from respondents between ages 18 and 29 – the highest number in this category. The lowest response (8%) was received from respondents between 50 years and above.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



28 responses were received from male respondents, i.e. 57.1% of the total responses. While 21 respondents (42.9%) were received from female respondents in the state. This gives a nearly balanced gender representation of respondents in the state vis-à-vis the total number of responses (49).

RELIGION



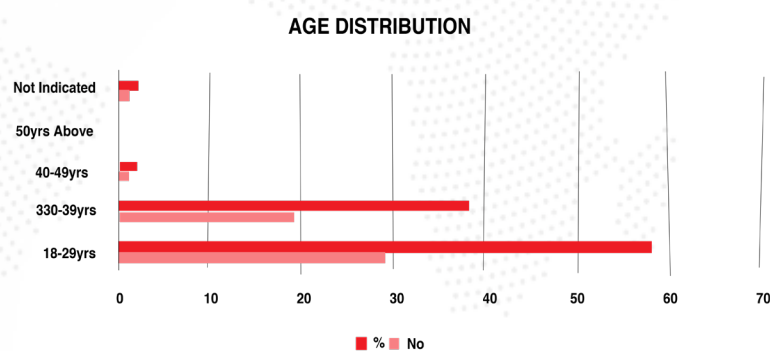
Plateau

Plateau State is the twelfth largest state of Nigeria, roughly located in the center of the country. It is geographically unique in Nigeria because its boundaries surround the Jos Plateau, having the Jos Plateau totally in its central and northern parts. Its capital is Jos.

Plateau State is celebrated as “The Home of Peace and Tourism” with a population of around 3.5 million people. It is in the central region of Nigeria and is known for its diverse geography, captivating landscapes, and rich cultural heritage. The capital city, Jos, serves as a major centre for commerce and administration. The state derives its name from the picturesque Jos Plateau, which is characterized by rolling hills, rock formations, and temperate weather.

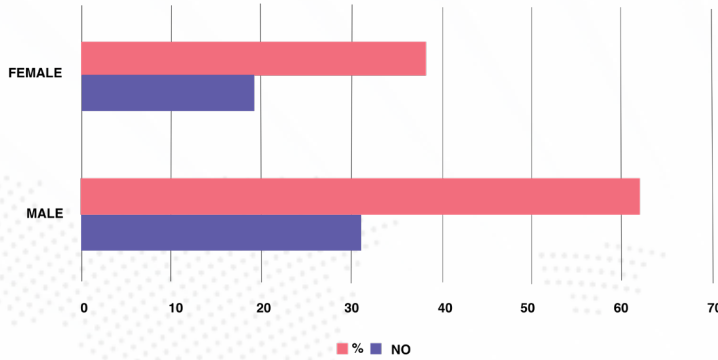
Plateau State boasts a multicultural population, with various ethnic groups such as the Berom, Afizere, Anaguta, and others coexisting harmoniously. This diversity is reflected in the vibrant traditions, festivals, and cuisine found in the region. Agriculture plays a significant role in the state’s economy, with fertile land supporting the cultivation of crops like potatoes, maize, and vegetables. The state is also rich in minerals, including tin and columbite, contributing to its historical significance in the mining industry.

Despite the rich deposits of natural resources, Plateau State has faced challenges related to inter-communal conflicts, often rooted in ethnic and religious differences. Efforts have been made to promote peace and unity, but addressing these issues remains a crucial aspect of the state’s development. Plateau State is a destination for tourists seeking a blend of cultural experiences and scenic landscapes. The state continues to evolve, balancing its economic potential with the preservation of its unique cultural identity.



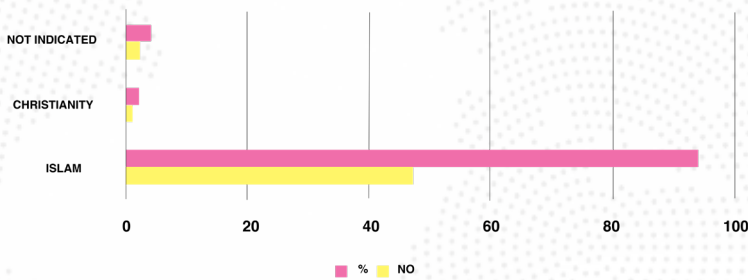
In Plateau, 58% of the total responses were received from those who fall within 18-29 years and 35% of the responses were received from respondents within the ages of 30-39 years. There was no response from respondents within the age range of 50 years and above.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



62% of respondents in the state were male while 38% of responses were received from females.

RELIGION



94% of responses were received from respondents who belong to the Islamic faith while 2% was received from respondents from the Christian faith. 4% of responses did not indicate religion.

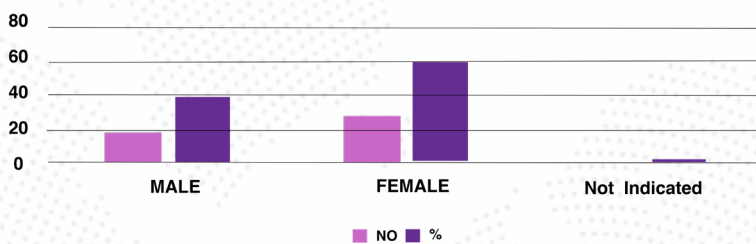
Osun

Osun State, situated in southwestern Nigeria, is renowned for its rich cultural heritage, historical significance, and vibrant traditions. The capital city, Osogbo, serves as a hub for administrative and economic activities. The state derives its name from the Osun River, a major watercourse that runs through its landscape. It was created from the old Oyo State in August 1991, with a large population of both Muslims and Christians. It is also characterized by a diverse population comprising various ethnic groups such as the Yoruba.

The people of Osun State take pride in their cultural festivals, with the Osun-Osogbo Festival standing out as a globally recognized celebration that draws both locals and tourists.

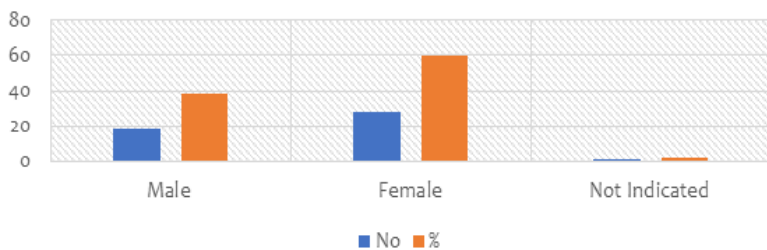
Agriculture plays a pivotal role in the state’s economy, with fertile soil supporting the cultivation of crops like cocoa, yams, and palm produce. The state also has historical significance, with sites like the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove showcasing the intersection of spirituality and nature. Osun is the ninth smallest in area and nineteenth most populous with an estimated population of about 4.7 million as of 2016.

AGE DISAGGREGATION



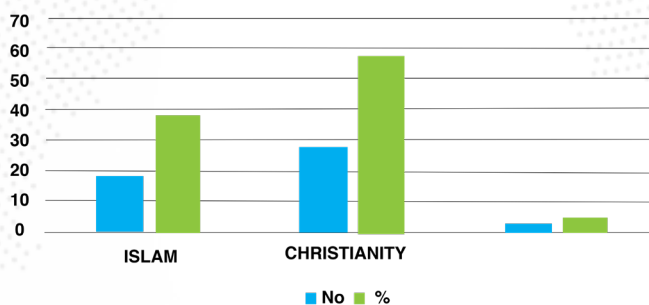
A total of 47 responses were received from the state. Of the total number, 36% of respondents fell within 18-29 years. 34% of respondents were between 30-39 years. Only 8% of respondents were between age 50 and above and 6% of respondents did not disclose their age range.

Gender Disaggregation



Osun state had more female respondents than male respondents with 59.6% responses (female) and 38% responses (male).

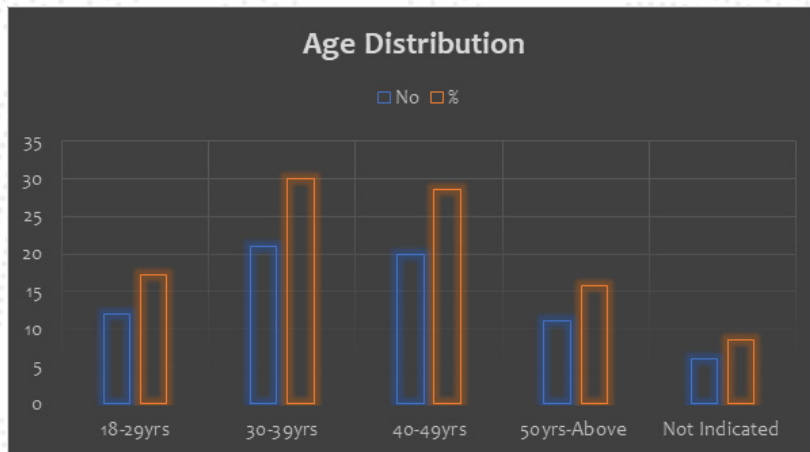
RELIGION



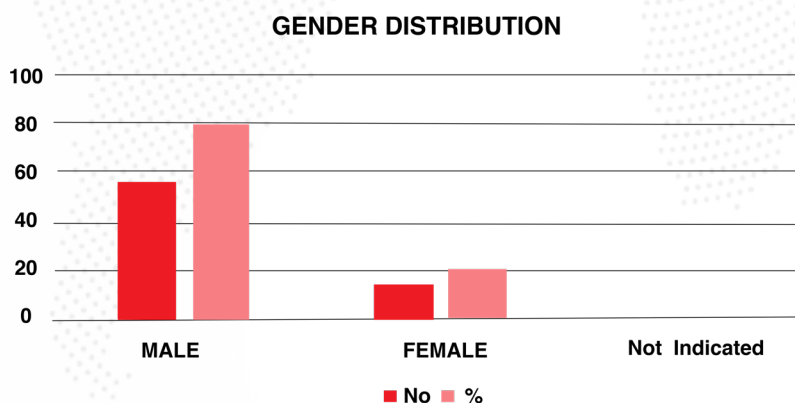
In terms of religious profile, 38% of responses were received from respondents who belong to the Islamic faith and 57% from respondents who belong to the Christian faith.

Ebonyi

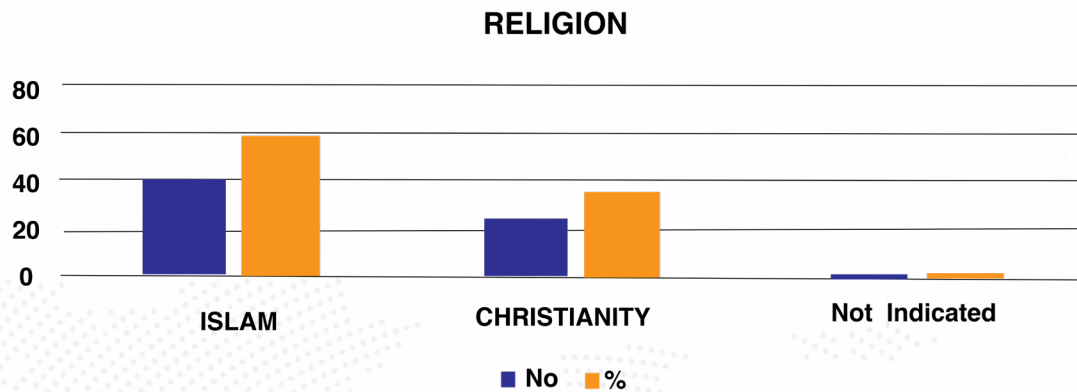
Ebonyi State is in southeastern Nigeria with an estimated population of nearly 2.9 million as of 2016. It is one of Nigeria’s youngest states created in 1996, with Abakaliki as its capital city. Ebonyi state is characterized by its agricultural activities, with a focus on crops such as rice, yams, and cassava. The state is often referred to as the “Salt of the Nation” due to its salt deposits and production. The people of Ebonyi are primarily of Igbo descent and are predominantly Christians. Tourist attractions in Ebonyi include the Amancho Caves, Ndibe Beach, and the Abakaliki Green City, showcasing the state’s commitment to environmental sustainability.



A total of 100 responses were received from Ebonyi state. Respondents from 18-29 years (17%), 30-39 years (30%), 40-49 years (28.5%), 50-above years (15%). 8.5% of respondents did not indicate their age.



80% of respondents in Ebonyi state were male and 20% were female.



The deployment of questionnaires in the state was targeted more at the Muslim population to understand the dynamics of religious freedom in a predominant Christian state. Thus, 60% of responses were received from respondents from the Islamic faith and 37.1% responses from respondents who practice the Christian faith. However, 2.9% of respondents did not indicate their religion.

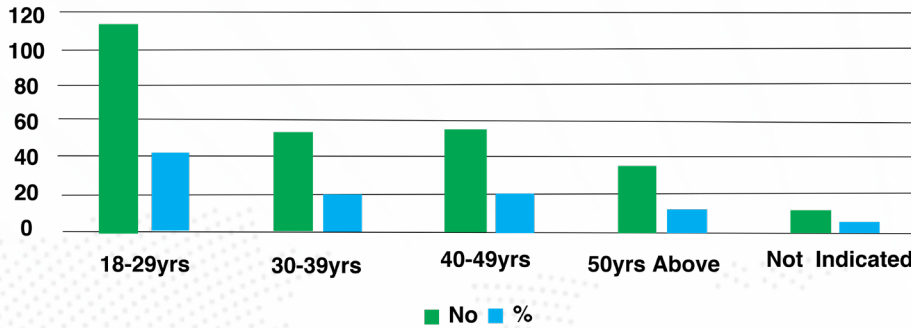
Edo

Edo State is in southern Nigeria and is known for its rich cultural heritage and historical significance. The capital city is Benin City, which was once the seat of the ancient Benin Kingdom, renowned for its artistic and bronze-casting traditions. Edo State is home to diverse ethnic groups, with the Edo people being the predominant group. The population of the state is approximately 5 million.

The state boasts a mixture of urban and rural landscapes, with a combination of modern infrastructure and traditional architecture. Agriculture is a key economic activity, contributing to the state's economy alongside industries such as oil and gas. It is made up of four major ethnic groups; namely Edo (Binis), Owan, Esan and Afemai (Etsako & Akoko Edo).

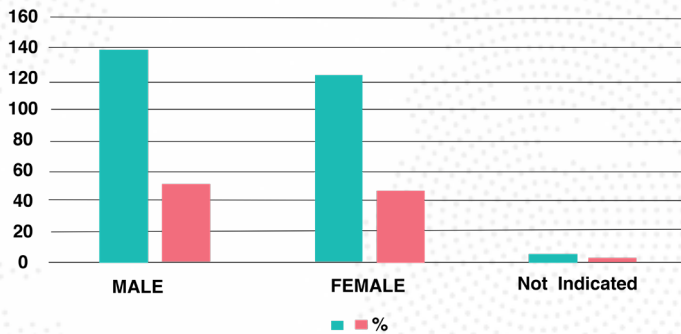
Tourism plays a significant role in Edo State, drawing visitors to explore historical sites like the Benin City Walls and the National Museum, which showcases artefacts reflecting the region's cultural heritage. Festivals like the annual Edo Festival celebrate the vibrancy of local traditions, arts, and customs.

AGE DISTRIBUTION



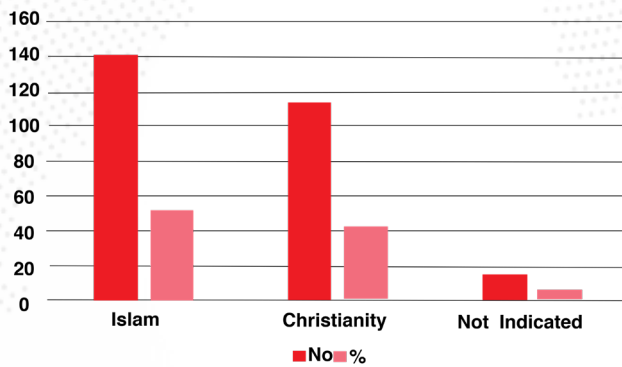
A total of 269 questionnaires were received in the state. 113 questionnaires (42%) were filled by respondents between 18-29 years, while 20% of the questionnaires were filled by respondents between 30-39 years. 13% of respondents were 50 years and above.

GENDER DISTRIBUTION



140 responses (52%) of the survey were filled by male respondents while 124 responses (46%) were filled by female respondents.

RELIGION



140 responses (52%) were received from the state from respondents who practice Islam while 114 responses (42.4%) were received from respondents who practice Christianity. 15 (5.6%) respondents did not indicate their religion.

Scope and Limitations of Survey

This survey is designed within a scope that is subject to some limitations which warrant professional consideration. Foremost among these limitations is the study's restricted scope, which primarily investigates violations within the framework of Christianity and Islam, having minimal evidence of violations that occur at the intra-sectarian and inter-denominational levels. The survey in Kano however reveals that these violations exist as there are reports citing violation of rights of individuals within the context of intra-religious relationships.

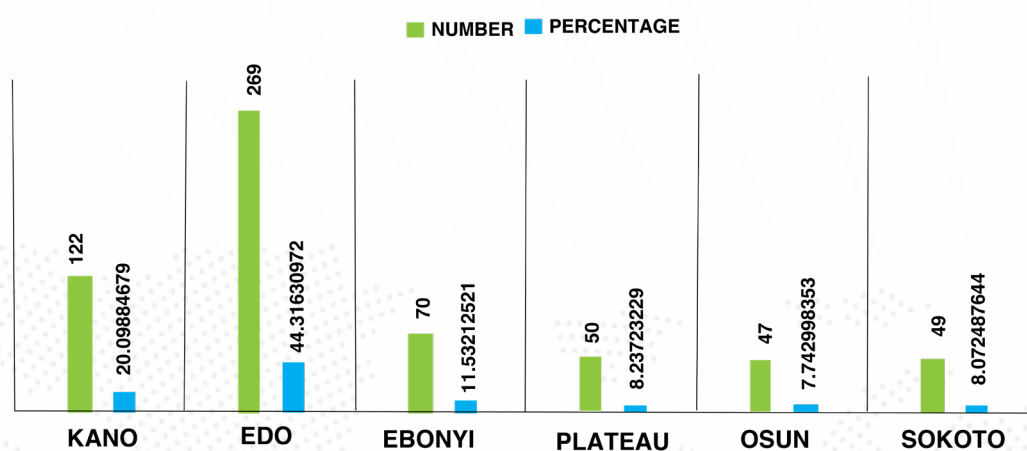
The uneven representation of data resulting from the survey's open target of responses may not have fully portrayed the issues regarding freedom of religion and belief within the Nigerian context. Furthermore, the survey confronts a challenge regarding the limited evidentiary support for claims of religious discrimination and rights violations made by respondents. Given the intricate and multifaceted nature of such a claim, providing evidence is indispensable for substantiating assertions of discrimination and rights infringements.

While the survey endeavours to illuminate the complexities surrounding the freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria, it is imperative to acknowledge and address limitations stemming from the scope of the survey, uneven data representation, and limited evidentiary foundation from claims made by respondents. However, future research endeavours can aspire to unearth a more nuanced understanding of religious freedom dynamics within the Nigerian context.

Findings

The survey took cognizance of the population, cultural and social dynamics of Nigeria. Thus, interviews and questionnaires were deployed to Kano and Sokoto (Northwest), Edo (South-south), Plateau (Northcentral), Ebonyi (Southeast) and Osun (Southwest). This is to ensure that selected population samples represent the characteristics of the larger population and that this should elicit the production of disaggregated issues regarding freedom of Religion and belief in Nigeria.

SURVEY RESPONSES



This section of the report provides a brief background of states where the survey questionnaires were deployed to understand the context and the background of the subject matter in relation to the findings of the survey. The section also covers a broad spectrum of thematic areas the interview focused on which include incidents of violation of freedom of religion and belief across the surveyed state. Findings of the interview explain the typologies of violations of freedom of religion and belief in each state and how they manifest in different forms. These manifestations have widely been categorized into two: violations that are violent in nature (killings and destruction of properties) and non-violent violations.

In depth Interviews

Findings from the interviews in all the states reveal that there are existing violations of religion and beliefs. These violations are done with the underlying ideology of dominance of religious majority over the minority. The issue of denial of places of worship is a recurrent theme in all the states where interviews were held. Further details of these violations are explained according to each of the states.

Kano

In the context of Kano, the discourse surrounding the freedom of religion and belief operates at two levels. There are violations that occur at the inter-religious level and the intra-religious levels.

Government Restrictions on Religious Worship: The prevailing dichotomy between the Muslim majority and Christian minority in the state exists concurrently with internal schism between Sunni and Shi'ite sects within the Muslim community compounds these challenges, often resulting in arrests and detentions. For example, in 2021, the state Government banned a controversial Islamic cleric, Abduljabbar Nasiru Kabara, from sermon in the state over alleged inciting preaching. The government also ordered the immediate closure of his mosque and his preaching center located at Filin Mushe in the heart of Kano city. It was reported that the cleric has been engaging in an intense debate with Sunni Muslim clerics in the state for a longtime for his hardline stance against Sunni practices and his subscription to Shiite practices. While the action of the state government is premised on 'public interest' as enshrined in Constitution, there is general perception that there is a religious dimension to these decisions.

Denial of Access to Social Amenities: Furthermore, the interview reveals that Christian minorities in the state are victims of persecution in the aspect of state employment, religious freedom, and the provision of basic amenities. A respondent decried the level of violations his community faces in the state:

The issue of jobs in Kano and Nigeria at large is a national problem. However, our case is so obvious in Kano. We hardly get employed (sic) unless we use someone, or you know someone that knows someone, who knows someone or has the hidden opportunity. However, openly or plainly, Hausa Christians cannot be given a job in government sectors through mere interview.... We only benefit from infrastructural facilities through our neighbors, that is our Muslim brethren. But it's hard to see Hausa Christian-dominated areas with good roads, and clean water, whether tap or borehole water. Unless they are mixed with Muslims. I know many villages in Tudun Wada LGA in Sumaila, Kibiya, and the rest of them that don't have electricity, good water, and good road, just because they are Christians. Christians in some local governments in kano are facing challenges to freedom of worship, we have a series of reports on attacks on our people in their places of worship. Local governments like Sumaila, Kibiya Garko, and others have experienced many trials regarding their faith.

The interview with respondent shows that there are no equal opportunities for jobs in the state and religion allegedly plays a significant role even in terms of bringing dividends of democracy in Christian minority communities. Also, the view of the respondent corroborates with the survey which indicated 81% of respondents say they have experienced violations of their freedom of religion.

Lack of Representation in Governance: Lack of Representation in Governance: Respondents disclosed that vying for political and appointive positions seem to be exclusively reserved for Muslims in the state as Christian minorities are not allowed to exercise their rights to be voted for as enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. One of the interviewees speaks on this issue thus:

In 2001 one of the Christians in Gani Mission community, Sumaila LGA contested for election as councilor and he won but on reaching Government house in Kano, they declined the result and denied him the position. And government still sent security personnel to calm the situation in the LGA, thinking that the Christians youths might protest against for denying them the opportunity. Till then none of the Christians contested for any political position.

The general perception of those interviewed is that this disproportionate representation is because of the existing structure which makes it impossible for Christian minorities in the state to hold positions.

Enforcement of religious Laws by Hisbah: The interviews reveal that Christian Minorities are sometimes faced with the challenge of being subjected to some religious enforcement by Hisbah, the religious police in Kano State. This adds another layer of complexity in the state especially regarding religion and the legal framework surrounding enforcement of civil law (by the police) vis-à-vis religious laws by Hisbah. A respondent disclosed how one Mary Mark, a twelve-year-old girl was converted into Islam by Hisbah having departed from her aunt's house for fear of being punished after stealing.

While 96% response indicated their knowledge on freedom of religion and belief in the state, the interviews corroborate with instances with survey in the state shows that there is a high percentage of violations in the state at 69%. Overall, the survey puts Kano as one of the states where issues of violations of Freedom of Religion and Belief is predominant.

Sokoto

Denial to build churches: Respondents from some communities in Illela and Sokoto South LGA said that violations of their right to religion and belief are mostly done in terms of denial to certain rights. According to a respondent, Christians face severe restrictions when it comes to acquiring lands for building churches. Respondent highlighted that there is a pervasive practice among community leaders to expressly forbid the use of lands bought by Christians for such purposes. These restrictions are often enforced through the inscribing and stamping of land credentials, explicitly stating that building churches and hotels is prohibited. Even the formation of house

care fellowships, an essential aspect of Christian community gatherings, is sometimes met with disapproval.

Threats of Burning Houses Belonging to Christians: Respondents say there are many instances where have reportedly been threatened by Muslims in the community with the prospect of their houses being burned down if they dare to organize house care prayers. Such threats not only instill fear but also hinder the free practice of religious beliefs, contributing to an atmosphere of religious intolerance and tension within the community. Some have questioned the response of the state government in the face of these violations:

Basically, if you come to the government, they will tell you, "they will do this, they will do that." But they will not take action.... Because I could remember, there is one church in Marbella of Eka Church. They build (sic) the church to the extent of lintel level but just one night, a caterpillar came and demolished all the building. Up till today, no government has said anything.

Denial of Scholarship Opportunities: The discrimination against Christians extends beyond land ownership to education opportunities, particularly in the allocation of scholarships. According to a respondent, Christians in the state are systematically denied scholarships simply because they bear Christian names. This discriminatory practice has compelled many Christian families to resort to naming their children with Muslim names in order to increase their chances of accessing educational scholarships and opportunities. Respondents strongly believe that the politicization of religion in the state exacerbates the disparities faced by Christians. They highlighted that the political landscape heavily favors Muslims, resulting in preferential treatment and opportunities for Muslims while marginalizing Christians. This systemic bias not only perpetuates inequality but also contributes to the exacerbation of religious tensions and violations in Sokoto.

Plateau

The general perception of those interviewed is that this disproportionate representation is because of the existing structure which makes it impossible for Christian minorities in the state to hold positions.

Denial of Admission into Tertiary Institution:

The interviews shed light on instances where individuals belonging to the Muslim faith encountered barriers to education. One respondent recounted how their brother was unjustly denied admission into a tertiary institution solely because of his religious affiliation as a Muslim.

Restricted Wear of Hijab in Certain Locations:

The interviews revealed a concerning trend where certain locations within Plateau state are deemed unwelcoming for Muslims who choose to wear hijabs. These areas are considered “no-go” zones for Muslims, indicating a deep-seated intolerance and exclusionary practices within the

community. The prohibition of wearing hijabs in specific places extends beyond mere sartorial choices; it infringes upon the fundamental right of individuals to express their religious identity freely and practice their faith without fear of reprisal or discrimination.

Criticism of Dressing: Another significant aspect highlighted in the interviews is the criticism faced by Muslims regarding their dressing, particularly from individuals perceived to be Christians. Such criticism underscores the challenges of religious coexistence and tolerance within Plateau state. The scrutiny of Muslim attire contributes to a hostile environment where individuals feel marginalized and ostracized based on their religious beliefs.

Osun

Religious Identity and Education:

The in-depth interview reveals that respondents use native names rather than Islamic names to acquire formal education in Isale, Ilesa. This reveals the negotiation of identity among individuals

navigating educational systems. A respondent disclosed that he had to change his name from Ibrahim to Adebayo in order to acquire formal education and for fear of facing discrimination.

This phenomenon suggests a form of cultural adaptation where individuals may adopt strategies to reconcile their religious and cultural identities with the educational environment. It also sheds light on the historical and sociocultural context where certain religious identities are marginalized or stigmatized within formal education systems, prompting individuals to conceal or modify aspects of their identity to navigate these spaces.

Denial of Professional Opportunities: A case in Oke-Gada as narrated by a respondent further reveals a systemic discrimination based on religious affiliation within professional settings. The respondent alleged being denied an opportunity to be promoted to the rank of principal in a senior public school because of her religion:

In 2021, I was supposed to become a principal in a government public school, but because the school was a missionary school before it becomes (sic) government owned, I was rejected. The school PTA say (sic) I can't be their principal because I am a Muslim, that I will Islamize the school. They later went to school authority and brought a woman that I senior with two years in service to become the principal and they sent me to become a principal in a junior secondary school.

The denial of promotion to the respondent due to fears of "Islamization" reflects deeply ingrained prejudices and suspicions, perpetuating religious divisions and hindering individuals' career advancement opportunities. This discrimination not only affects the individual's professional growth but also underscores broader societal perceptions surrounding religious minorities in

positions of authority and influence within public institutions.

Religious Freedom and Public Institutions: One controversial issue that has come up in the past two decades in South is the issue of wearing hijab to public schools. In Ede, respondent say that they have faced this challenge:

Yes, I have experienced violations of my rights because of my hijab. In 2016, I was still in secondary school [when] our school principal was changed to a Christian woman. The woman asked all the female Muslim wearing hijab to remove it on the assembly ground. That is not part of our uniform. She forcefully removed the hijab from our head. These issues turned into a serious fight between the school principal and some Muslim leaders in the community. The issue was later resolved by the state government.

This raises significant questions about religious freedom and secularism within public education systems. It also represents a clash between individual rights to practice religion freely and institutional policies that may prioritize secularism or uniformity. This issue reflects broader debates surrounding the balance between religious freedoms and state secularism, with implications for multiculturalism, social cohesion, and the protection of minority rights within the Nigerian society.

Denial of Interfaith Relationships:

Interfaith marriages in the State (between Christians and Muslim) faces strong resentment. A respondent from the state disclosed that he faced serious opposition from his family for choosing to marry a lady from the Muslim faith.

This instance gleans into the complexities individuals face when navigating familial and societal expectations, particularly concerning marriage and religious identity. This instance is a reflection of a broader societal attitudes towards interfaith unions, influenced by cultural traditions, religious teachings, and historical narratives.

Overall, these issues reflect the complex interconnectedness between religion, identity, and the law in Nigeria. Within this context, promoting inclusivity, respect for diversity, and the protection of individual rights ensures equitable and harmonious societies where individuals can freely express their religious beliefs and cultural identities without fear of discrimination or marginalization.

Ebonyi State

Findings from the interview are discussed under some specific issues germane to the subject violations of religion and belief in Nigeria.

Coercion of Traditional Practices on Muslim Minority: Findings from the interview reveal that Igbo Muslims in the state, face the challenge of subjection to traditional initiation which is against their faith. Some deeply rooted cultural practices such as the rite of passage into adulthood and marital initiation are still held in high regard. The respondent alleged facing subjugation from community despite such practices are against their beliefs as Muslims. According to respondents, perpetrators of these violations are usually identified as Christians while others are traditionalists who strongly believe in Igbo culture and tradition as practiced by their ancestors. The rejection of these practices by Muslims in the community has created hatred. Muslims are alleged to be discriminated for embracing a religion perceived to be an ‘abomination’ in Igbo land.

Denial of Rights to Worship: Respondents interviewed disclosed that sometimes, there are circumstances where they are denied calling for prayers. A respondent from Onueke in Eza North LGA, said that he was chased from the prayer ground and was denied praying Adhan: “I can remember one man that said we should not call Adhan in our community.” In this case, the respondent’s experience of being chased from the prayer ground and denied the opportunity to call for prayers highlights a violation of fundamental human rights, particularly the freedom of religion and the right to practice one’s faith without fear or hindrance.

Destruction of Mosque: The ongoing agitation by the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) has a strong influence on the freedom and belief of both Christians and Muslims in the state. Youths in some communities have taken advantage of this conflict to exploit individuals and to commit crimes. According to a respondent, youths have organized themselves to attack a mosque in Awutu-Eda in 2021 against the claim that it was a reaction to an intended attack by Fulani herdsmen in the community:



Some of the militant boys organized themselves in the night and they came against our mosque.... they came to our mosque without any provocation. They came with petrol... and put on fire in the night.”

According to the respondent:



the youths used the IPOB agitation “as a source of excuse to come against the mosque. That time, they were destroying the mosque of the Muslims in the South East”

This further reveals how issues of conflict are exploited to further perpetrate heinous crimes in society.

Discriminatory practices against Muslim Minorities: Respondents disclosed that the Christian majority in their communities do not encourage them from practicing their religion and belief. In some instances, Muslims have experienced discrimination of diverse forms in the community.



¹I will say I have being (sic) violated in my right to religion. When it comes to mode of dressing, we are being discriminated, we are not being given that full right...A family friend of mine, [while] writing an exam, the lecturer have [sic] to come and just pull out her hijab from her. It wanted to result into a problem but Alhamdulillah, it was subsided by the school security agents.

Consequently, Muslims in some communities find it difficult to reveal their identity and religion. Thus, they conceal it in a bid to be accepted by relatives and the community. Some have been disowned by their families because of their faith.

It is pertinent to note that responses from interviews indicate that violations in Ebonyi are mostly not violent. The non-violent aspect of the violations is however having devastating impact on the sociology of victims which calls for social reintegration in communities to provide cohabiting environment for individuals to practice their faith. Beyond serving as a platform for reporting human rights violations, HRC can collaborate with other partners to create initiatives where victims can undergo psycho-social support and there should be awareness created in communities on the need to accept religious pluralism despite cultural or family affiliations.

Edo State

Interview responses from Edo state highlights a recurrent theme of denial of place of worship for Muslim minority and lack of job opportunities. According to interviewees, (5x) the dominance of Christianity over Islam in the state has created a hierarchical structure where minority faiths are relegated to the margins, facing systemic barriers in various facets of life.

¹ Interview with respondent conducted at Enohia, Afiko LGA, Ebonyi state 2023.

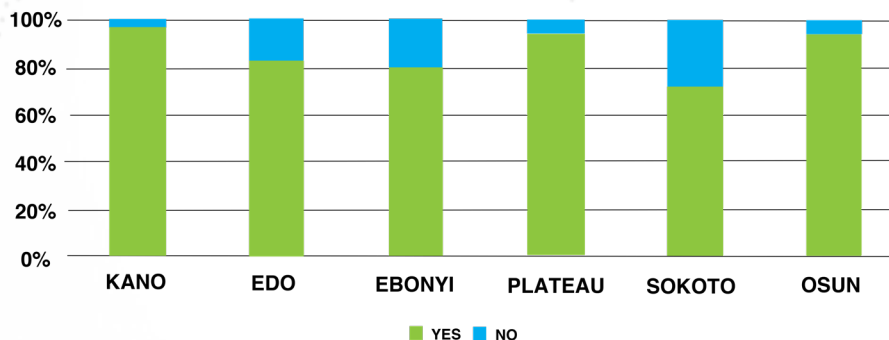
Similarly, the discrimination faced by Muslim minorities in job opportunities highlights the intersectionality of religious identity and socio-economic status. It underscores the need for policies and initiatives aimed at promoting diversity, inclusion, and equal opportunities in the workforce.

Survey Questionnaire

This section of the report focuses on quantitative survey which explored diverse perspectives on freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. The findings revolve around key broad themes which include **Awareness and Knowledge of Rights** to examine respondents’ awareness of constitutional rights regarding freedom of religion and belief, including the sources of their information, **Experience of Violations** to explore instances where individuals or their families have encountered violations of their freedom of religion and belief; **Reporting and Response Mechanisms** which examines whether respondents are aware of reporting mechanisms for such violations and their perceptions of government responses, **Inter-religious Dialogue** to understand respondents’ knowledge of inter-religious dialogue and their opinions on its potential role in addressing freedom of religion and belief issues, **Media Coverage** to assess perceptions of how the media covers issues related to freedom of religion and belief. Findings also examine **Government and Constitutional Provisions** to explore opinions on the proactive nature of the government and the perceived strength of constitutional provisions in deterring violations, vis-à-vis respondents’ optimism or pessimism regarding the possibility of addressing violations in Nigeria.

Awareness and Knowledge Rights

DO YOU KNOW THAT IT IS YOUR CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT TO PRACTICE ANY RELIGION/BELIEF OF YOUR CHOICE IN NIGERIA?



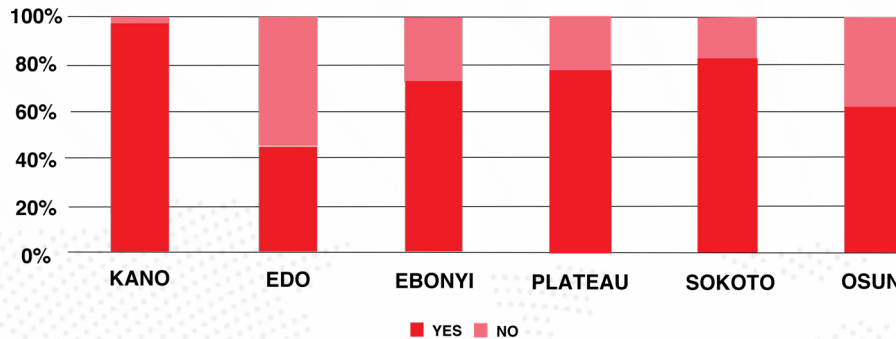
The survey on knowledge of human rights reveals distinct patterns in the awareness of the constitutional rights of citizens to practice any religion across the surveyed states. In Kano, 96.7% of respondents assert their knowledge of this constitutional provision, with a meagre 3.3% expressing uncertainty about their constitutional rights to practice their religion. In Edo State, 82.8% of respondents are aware of this constitutional right, while 17% admit not knowing about their rights. In Ebonyi, 80% of respondents affirm their awareness of the constitutional right, while 20% remain unaware. Plateau exhibits a strong awareness with 94%, leaving only 6% unaware of their right. In Sokoto, the awareness drops to 71%, indicating a notable contrast, with 29% admitting a lack of awareness. Osun State reveals a high level of awareness, with 93.6% acknowledging their constitutional right, while 6.4% are uninformed.

In Kano, where awareness is notably high at 96.7%, the influence of cultural values and local educational initiatives could have essentially driven this level of awareness. The state prioritizes constitutional education and inclines toward embracing and understanding constitutional freedoms. The relatively low awareness level in Sokoto at 71% suggests the presence of challenges in disseminating information about constitutional rights. Exploring the correlation between awareness creation and socio-economic indicators could provide further insights into the underlying dynamics shaping these awareness levels.

Source of Information

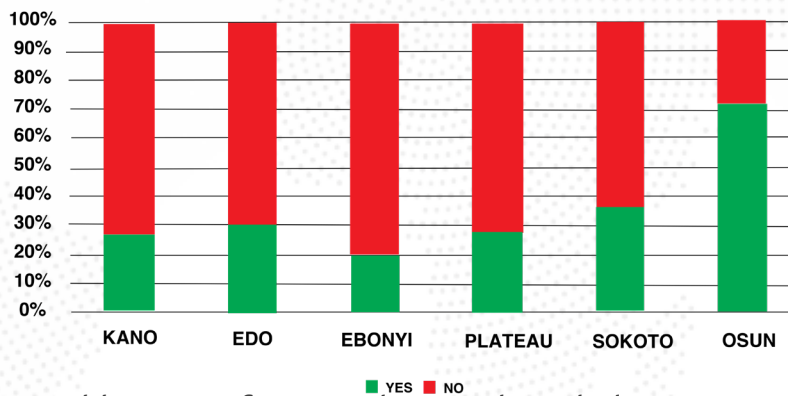
The responses about freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria highlight differing patterns across the surveyed states. 98.4% of respondents in Kano have received information about the freedom to exercise their rights to religion and belief. In Edo state, only 44.6% have received information on this subject matter. In Ebonyi, 72.8% of respondents indicated that they have received information about freedom of religion and belief with 78% in Plateau state. Sokoto, with 81.6%, exhibits a comparatively higher awareness, which could be attributed to effective communication channels within religious institutions and educational facilities, and Osun shows a moderate level of awareness of 61.7%.

HAVE YOU EVER RECEIVED ANY INFORMATION ON FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF IN NIGERIA FROM ANY ORGANISATION OR AGENCY?



Respondents identified the sources of information to be schools, the Nigerian Constitution, Churches, Mosques, radio, family, social media, and the National Human Rights Commission. These emphasize the role of both formal and informal information platforms and underscore the diverse channels through which information is disseminated. Optimizing communication channels based on local contexts can strengthen information delivery in underrepresented states.

DO YOU THINK THAT THOSE WHO VIOLATE THE FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF DO SO OUT OF IGNORANCE?

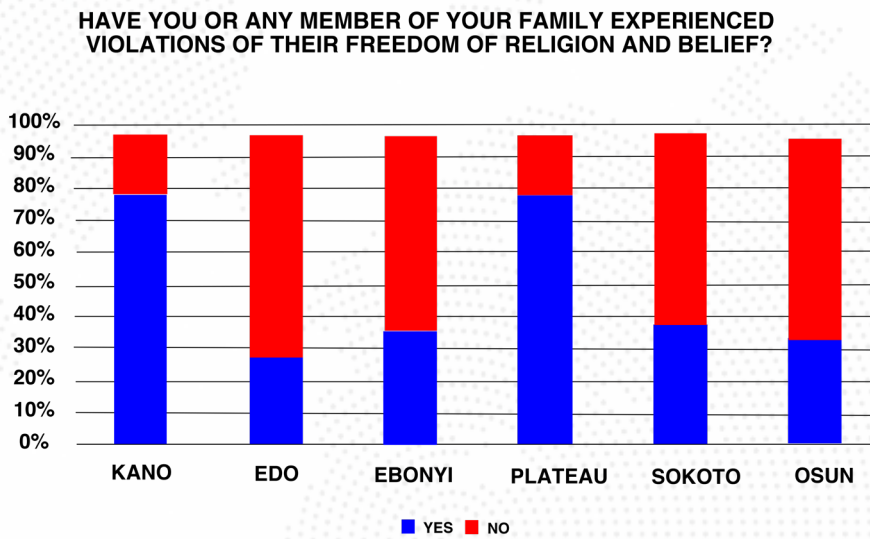


Within Osun, a notable 72% of respondents acknowledge a potential connection between religious freedom infringements and ignorance, indicative of a prevailing sentiment that insufficient awareness or understanding contributes to these violations. This underscores the perceived importance of educational initiatives to address and mitigate such instances within the state.

Contrarywise, in Plateau, 72% of respondents dissent from the proposition that violations stem from ignorance. This implies that respondents in Plateau may perceive religious freedom violations as influenced by factors beyond mere ignorance, potentially involving intentional actions or systemic issues.

In Kano and Sokoto, where 27% and 36% respectively agree that violations may result from ignorance, there is a recognition, albeit less pronounced than in Osun, of the potential efficacy of educational endeavours in mitigating religious freedom infringements. The discernibly sceptical viewpoint in Edo, with 70% disagreeing, underscores the interplay of various factors other than ignorance as root causes of religious freedom violations in Nigeria.

Experience of Violations



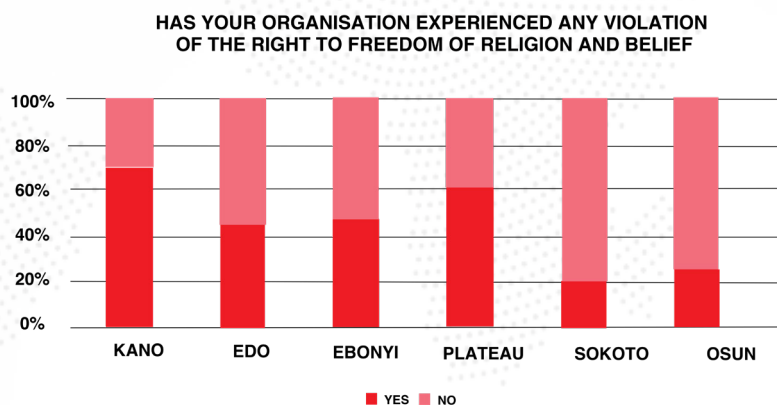
In Kano, a marked 81% of respondents reported experiencing violations of their freedom of religion and belief. This high percentage suggests a prevalent and possibly systemic challenge within the state. Edo, in contrast, exhibits a more favourable scenario, with only 21.9% reporting violations. This lower percentage implies a relatively better situation for religious freedom in the state. Ebonyi presents a moderate scenario, with 37% reporting violations and 63% indicating no such issues. Plateau emerges as a state with a considerable challenge, as a substantial 72% reported violations of their freedom of religion and belief while responses from Sokoto indicated 38% violations.



Violation at Organisational Level

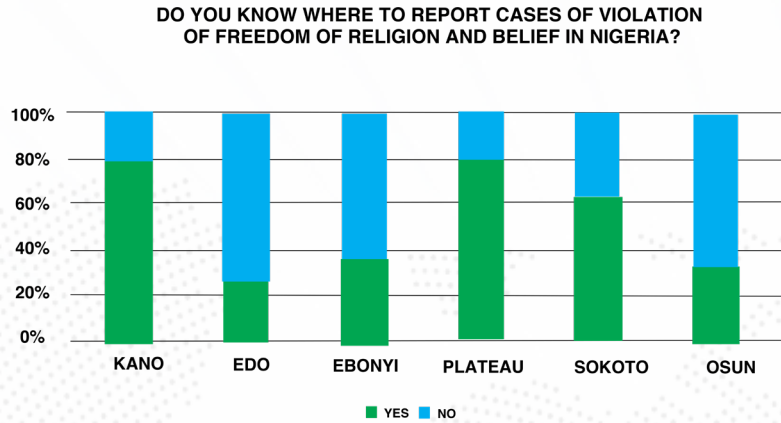
The high percentage of in Kano (63.9%) and Plateau (68%) to the question on the denial of rights to religion and belief indicates a concerning tendency. In Kano, where the majority agreed to have been denied their rights, it likely suggests a potential challenge to promoting religious pluralism in a democratic society, On the other hand, Plateau's similar response rate raises questions and concerns about a possible imbalance in religious freedom between the dominant and religious minority groups. Osun has the lowest percentage (16%) in terms of denial of rights on the grounds of one's religion and belief.

There are various levels of violations of rights of religion and belief in Nigeria. The most common of them is at the individual level. Although freedom of religion is enshrined in Section 38 Subsection 1 of the 1999 Constitution, incidents of such violations have made it uncertain for one to confidently practice their religion and faith in Nigeria. This has cast doubts in the minds of many such that even the Constitution is merely perceived to be paperwork lacking enforcement on perpetrators. The responses to violations of freedom of religion and belief at the organizational level differ from one state to the other.



Responses from Kano and Plateau states show that more than 60% indicated that their organizations have experienced violations of their rights. An interviewee revealed that such violations are manifested in terms of denial of places of worship and access to infrastructural development in their communities. All the states have recorded at least 20% violations of their rights to freedom of religion and belief.

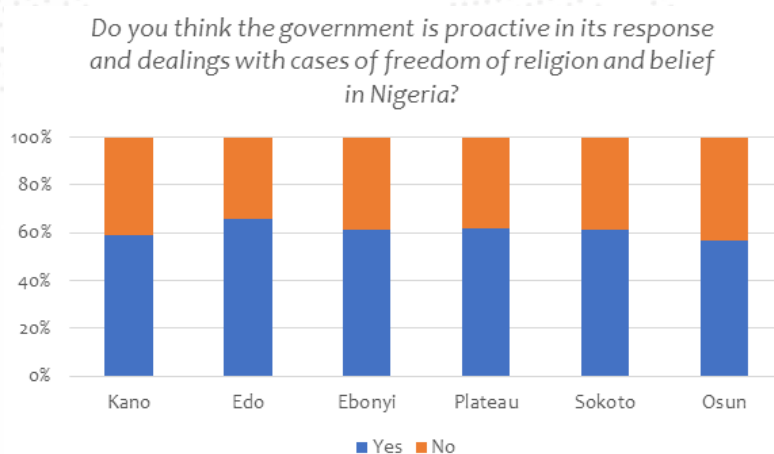
Reporting and Response Mechanisms



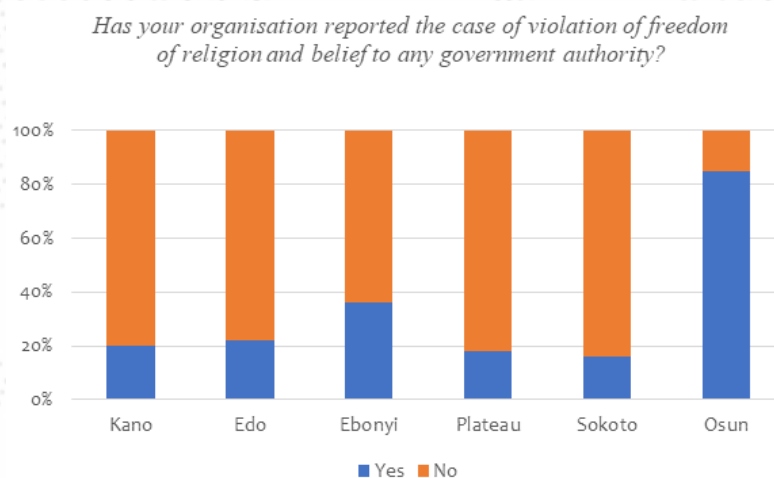
In Kano, 65.6% of respondents know where to report cases of violations while 34.4% are not aware. In Ebonyi, 46% know where to report such cases but 54% don't know. In Plateau, 56% know where to report cases of violations of their rights to freedom of religion and beliefs but 44% do not know.

Similarly, 63.3% of respondents in Sokoto are aware of where to report such cases but 36.7% are not. While in Osun 59.6% are not aware. There are several mentions of the Police in the responses and a few mentions of the National Human Rights Commission by respondents across the state.

It is pertinent to note that some interviewees do not trust the process of prosecuting violators of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. Others indicated that perpetrators are sometimes part of the system and structure of institutions and will find it overwhelming to embark on such attempts to report cases of violation.



More than 40% of responses across the six surveyed states think that the government has not been proactive in its response to dealing with human rights violations. In Osun, 57 per cent agree that the government is proactive in its response to dealing with such cases. But 59 per cent of responses from Kano think otherwise. Likewise in Edo, Ebonyi, and Plateau with 66, 61 and 62 per cent responses.

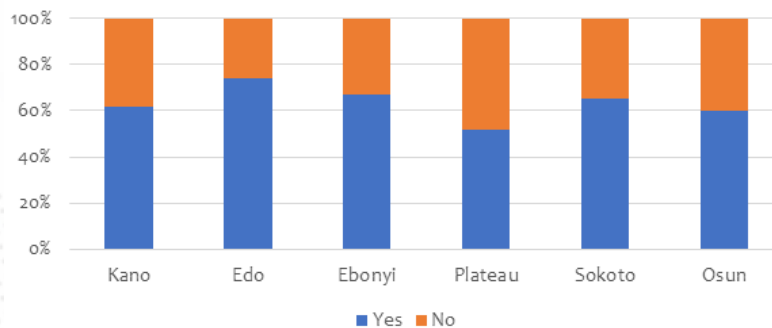


Reporting cases of violation of religion and belief in Nigeria is a serious problem as the violations. Perpetrators are given the impetus to repeat such violations when there is a lack of responsibility to report such cases by the violator and weak response mechanisms by agencies and commissions with such statutory responsibilities. It is interesting to note that apart from Osun state, more than 60% of responses indicated not to have reported any case to government authority. Also note that among these responses, cases are not reported either because such violations did not occur, or violations happened but were not reported. For responses that indicated reporting violations to government authorities, the Nigeria Police Force and religious leaders were mostly cited.

Inter-Religious Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue takes a multi-cultural and multi-religious society as its province. In Nigeria, inter-religious dialogue has gained prominence against the backcloth of socio-cultural realities of religious pluralism and the disintegration of religious harmony as a result of different factors such as the politicization of religion and lack of social cohesion arising from extremism and inter-ethnic conflict in many communities.

Do you think violation of freedom of religion and belief can be addressed through inter-religious dialogue?



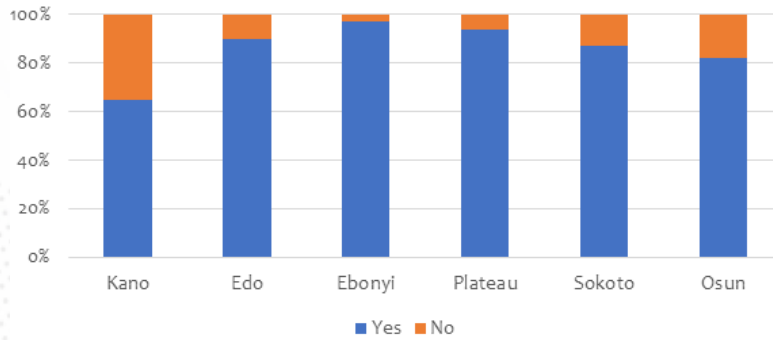
This specific survey question gauged the perception of respondents about the effectiveness of dialogue as a tool for promoting religious harmony and respect for the rights of citizens to practice their faith and religion. Responses from all surveyed states recorded more than 50% response that inter-religious dialogue can promote respect for the freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. Contrastively, Plateau has the highest percentage of respondents (48%) who think that the violation of freedom of religion and belief cannot be addressed through inter-religious dialogue.

This position falls in the school of thought of promoting dialogue of life rather than inter-religious dialogue. Dialogue of life is the interaction that occurs in a community where people of different ideologies, belief systems, religions, and cultures, collaborate and engage one another based on common humanity. While some see, it as a form of inter-religious dialogue, others perceive it to

be outside the purview of inter-religious dialogue. 'Inter-religion' emphasizes differences but humanity stresses what binds humankind. Overall, interreligious dialogue is seen to be a strong tool that can address the violation of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria.

Religious groups and faith-based organisations form the broader part of the society where societal and religious values are taught and promoted. They assume a crucial position as far as the promotion of religious freedom and inter-religious harmony are concerned. This is fundamental due to the significant role religion plays in Nigeria. The reality of having diverse religious groups explains the complex composition of the Nigerian people and society. The survey question assumes that these religious groups while acknowledging their difference in spiritual ideologies, will encourage the respect of these differences in a democratic society.

Does your religious group encourage freedom of religion and belief of other religions in Nigeria?



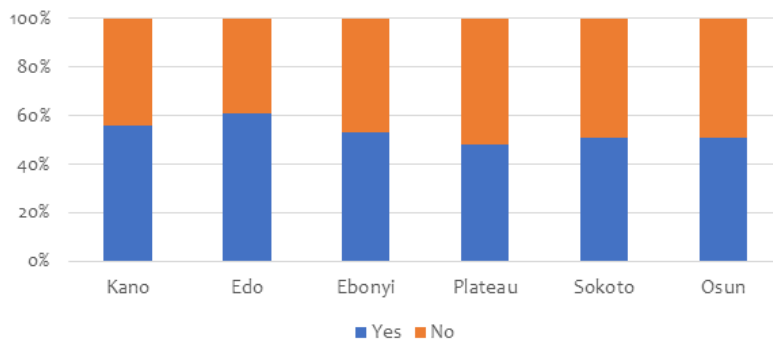
Responses from surveyed states clearly show that religious groups promote the respect of religious freedom in Nigeria as there are more than 80% responses from each of the states affirming that their religious groups promote and encourage the freedom of religion and belief in

Nigeria. On the contrary, less than 20% responses across the six (6) states indicated that their religious groups do not encourage freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria.

Media Coverage

The media is ideally the guardian of the values, virtues, and principles of human rights. This is so for a country like Nigeria where the media (both traditional and new media) serve as conveyor belts in disseminating information that shape the attitude and perceptions of citizens. However, the survey results indicate a mixed perception of media coverage of freedom of religion and belief across the surveyed states. Osun suggests a balanced view where 51% agreed that the media covers such issues, and 49% disagreed. This could be reflective of diverse opinions or varying experiences within the state.

In your opinion, do the media cover issues related to freedom of religion and belief in a balanced manner?



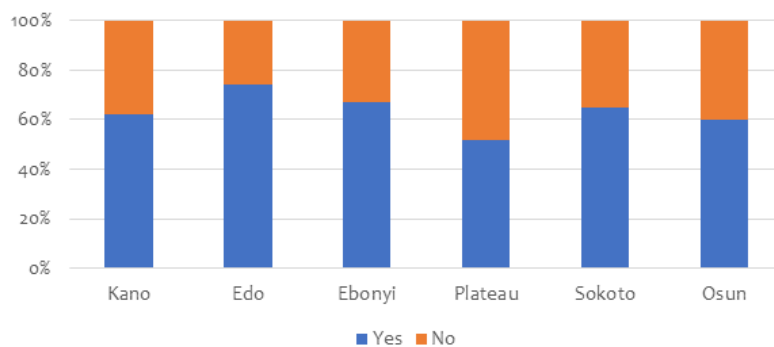
In Ebonyi, where 52.8% agreed, there seems to be a slightly more positive perception of media coverage. Plateau’s 48% agreement might suggest a more critical outlook on media portrayal of religious freedom issues. Sokoto’s 51% agreement reveals a similarly divided sentiment.

Importance of Awareness Creation

Promoting awareness about religious freedom in Nigeria can advance a society that respects and upholds the diverse beliefs of its citizens. Through education and outreach programs, awareness initiatives can spark constructive dialogue, encouraging communities, religious leaders, and policymakers to collaborate in creating an environment where diversity of belief is not only tolerated but celebrated.

Despite its crucial role, awareness creation for promoting religious freedom in Nigeria faces certain limitations. Firstly, deep-rooted cultural and religious biases can hinder the effectiveness of awareness campaigns. Pre-existing prejudices may be resistant to change, making it challenging to alter ingrained attitudes toward religious diversity. The accessibility of awareness programs poses a challenge. In remote or marginalized areas where educational resources and media reach are limited, disseminating information about religious freedom becomes more difficult. This geographical disparity may leave certain communities without the necessary knowledge to advocate for their rights or engage in meaningful conversations about religious tolerance.

Do you think awareness creation can mitigate the violation of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria?

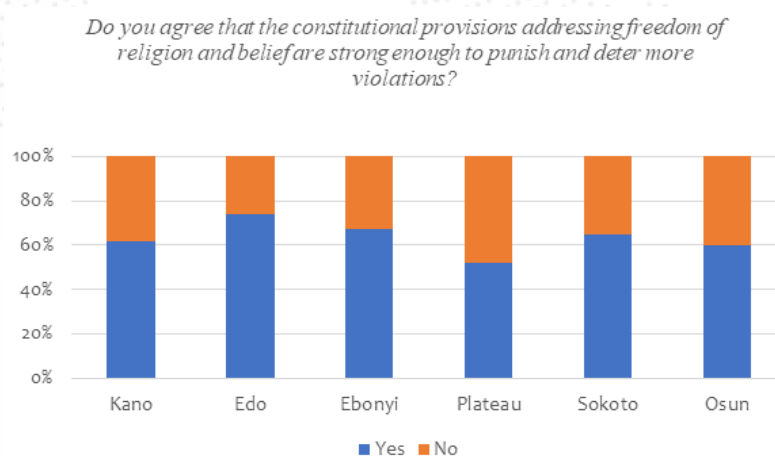


Respondents (more than 40% across the six states) generally hold a strong opinion that awareness creation can mitigate the violation of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. There is a contrasting opinion of not less than 30% of respondents in the states who are of the opinion that awareness creation is not likely to mitigate violation of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. ²“Awareness creation could have solved a lot of problems about religious intolerance Nigeria is facing today.”

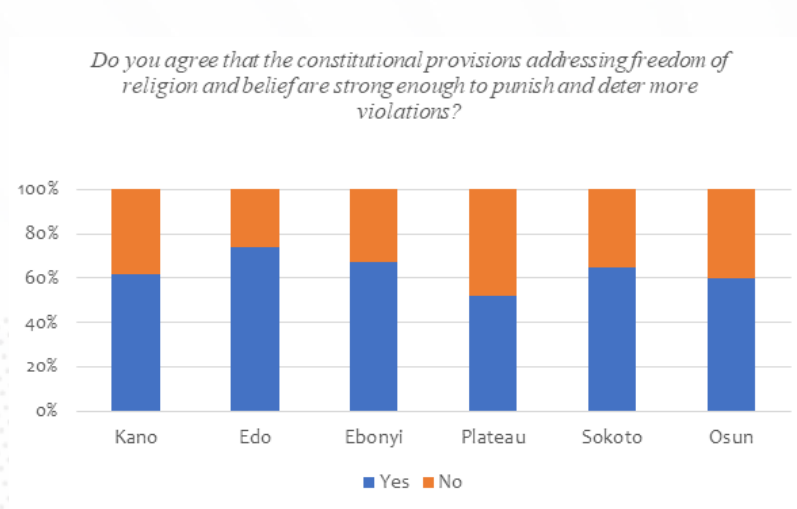
Constitutional Provisions

The 1999 Constitution provides the framework for the protection of human rights in Nigeria. Enshrined in Chapter IV of the Constitution, these rights cover a broad spectrum, including the right to life, dignity, personal liberty, and fair hearing. Furthermore, the constitution upholds the right to freedom of expression, association, and movement, reinforcing the democratic principles fundamental to Nigeria’s governance. The Constitution expressly prohibits torture, and inhumane or degrading treatment, and guarantees the presumption of innocence until proven guilty, reflecting an intention to safeguard the inherent dignity and well-being of every individual within the nation’s borders.

The Nigerian constitution also established institutions such as the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to monitor, protect, and promote human rights. While the constitutional provisions lay a strong foundation, challenges persist in the effective enforcement and protection of these rights. This survey question looks at the disposition of the government in terms of its response to addressing human rights cases.



²Interview with respondent residing in Plateau State



There is a generally positive response from all surveyed states (at least 50% from all the states) on the robustness of the constitutional frameworks that address the issue of violations of religion and belief in Nigeria. The Constitution of Nigeria demonstrates notable strengths in addressing challenges related to freedom of religion and beliefs, particularly concerning the punishment of violators. For instance, the constitutional framework establishes the judiciary as a key institution tasked with upholding these rights, allowing individuals to seek legal recourse in the event of violations.

Despite clear constitutional provisions, the enforcement of these rights faces practical obstacles and challenges in the application of laws. For instance, the Sharia law applied in states like Kano criminalizes behaviors such as alcohol consumption, gambling, and adultery, which may not be considered offenses under civil law. It also prescribes punishments such as amputation for theft and stoning for adultery, which are considered severe and inhumane by international human rights standards. Whereas civil law usually follows less severe penalties for similar offences.

Furthermore, the application of Sharia law has raised concerns about human rights violations, particularly regarding the rights of women, religious minorities, and individuals accused of violating religious principles. These highlight the challenges of harmonizing diverse legal systems within Nigeria and ensuring the protection of human rights for all citizens. These challenges are reflected in the response of those who believe the constitutional provisions are not sufficient to effectively address the issue of violations of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Recommendations have been offered by interviewees on the broad thematic areas that cover this survey. The recommendations range from strategies to improve awareness creation and the efficiency of government institutions responsible for providing public orientation regarding the subject matter. Recommendations also cover the reporting channels and response mechanisms, the role of the media and other inter-religious initiatives. The specific recommendations are explained as follows.

Strengthen Enforcement of the Constitutional Provision

It is imperative to strengthen the implementation of constitutional provisions. This can be achieved through targeted legal reforms aimed at enhancing the efficiency of the justice system, ensuring consistent application of laws, and addressing issues of corruption. Simultaneously, encouraging societal understanding and acceptance of religious diversity is crucial, emphasizing education and awareness campaigns to promote tolerance and respect. By combining legal and societal initiatives, Nigeria can create a more robust framework that effectively protects the freedom of religion while addressing the practical limitations embedded in the current constitutional provisions.

Enhance Community-led Initiatives Aimed at Raising Awareness

Interviewees recommended introduction of community-led initiatives aimed at raising awareness of freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria. Community engagement at the grassroots could deepen understanding of these fundamental human rights. Establishing local forums, workshops, and educational campaigns within communities can empower individuals to learn about, appreciate, and respect diverse religious perspectives. Collaborating with religious leaders, community influencers, and local organizations will facilitate the dissemination of accurate information and help dispel misconceptions. These initiatives should be culturally sensitive, acknowledging the diverse religious landscape in Nigeria, and should actively involve community members in shaping and implementing awareness programs.

Promotion of Dialogue of life among Religious Groups and Communities

While inter-religious dialogue has made a positive impact in Nigerian society, it is important to prioritize the “dialogue of life” approach. This approach involves fostering open, respectful, and ongoing communication among individuals from diverse religious backgrounds in their daily lives. Encouraging dialogue of life promotes understanding, empathy, and shared experiences, breaking down barriers that contribute to religious tensions. Initiatives should be developed to create opportunities for people of different faiths to engage in meaningful conversations, cultural exchanges, and collaborative community projects. By emphasizing shared values and common humanity, this approach can contribute significantly to building bridges of understanding, reducing stereotypes, and nurturing a culture of mutual respect for religious diversity. Integrating the dialogue of life into educational curricula, community events, and public discourse will be instrumental in creating a more harmonious and inclusive society that upholds and enhances freedom of religion and belief in Nigeria.

Enhancing Confidence through Institutional Collaboration to Strengthen Reporting Mechanism.

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) should actively promote its role as a trustworthy avenue for reporting such violations. This can be achieved through widespread awareness campaigns, collaborating with religious leaders, and ensuring accessibility to the NHRC by establishing more regional offices or outreach programs. Additionally, there should be targeted collaboration with law enforcement agencies to build confidence in their ability to address reported cases swiftly and impartially. The establishment of a dedicated unit within law enforcement agencies, trained to handle religious freedom violations, could enhance expertise and responsiveness.

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The strategic partners National Human Rights Commission, Nasrul-lahi-li Fathi Society, and The Kukah Centre, embarked on a mission to assess the state of religious freedom in Nigeria, funded by the King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for Interreligious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID). This undertaking was driven by a deep commitment to ensure that every individual has the right to practice their beliefs without fear or discrimination.

A survey was conducted on the violations of Freedom of Religious Belief (FoRB) in Nigeria, and this provided a comprehensive overview of the mechanism for monitoring Freedom of Religion and Belief, shedding light on the findings from targeted states and highlighting thematic areas that encapsulated the nature of violations against religious freedom in Nigeria. Importantly, the input from all partners injected data-based decisions and perspectives, enriching the content of this report.

This collaborative effort serves as a beacon for policymakers and stakeholders, and it outlines a mechanism for monitoring Freedom of Religion and Belief in Nigeria, offering a roadmap to safeguard these fundamental rights. With this initiative, we strive to empower the Nigerian government and law enforcement agencies to protect and defend the rights of all individuals to practice their faith freely and without persecution.

FREEDOM OF RELIGION AND BELIEF IN NIGERIA: A SURVEY

