



Reports

Dennis P. Petri

Who carries out attacks against religious communities and individuals? Insights from the VID (2022–2023)

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International Institute
for Religious Freedom



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for Religious Freedom

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Institut International pour la Liberté Religieuse
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We understand Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) as a fundamental and interdependent human right as described in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. In line with CCPR General Comment No. 22, we view FoRB as a broad and multidimensional concept that needs to be protected for all faiths in all spheres of society.



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Who carries out attacks against religious communities and individuals? Insights from the VID (2022–2023)

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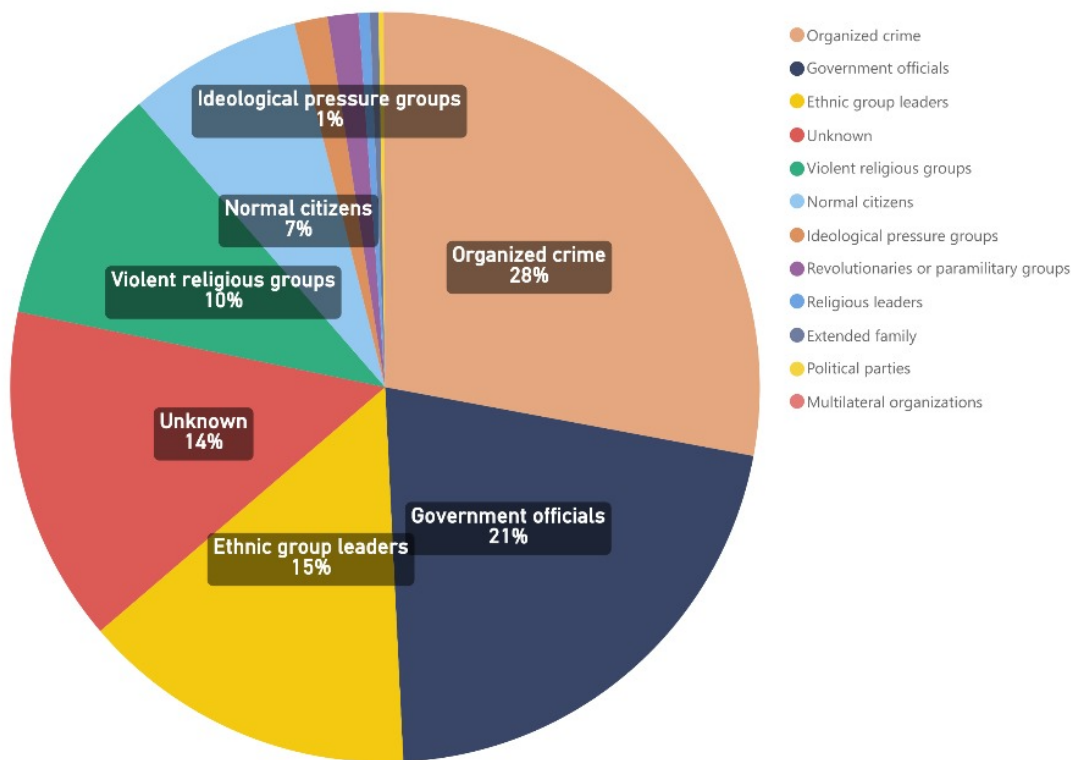
Who carries out attacks against religious communities and individuals? Insights from the VID (2022–2023)

When tracking violent incidents against religious groups and individuals, the targets are often quite clear and easy to identify in terms of both affiliation and identity. Tracking the affiliation of the perpetrators is an effort which requires a bit more consideration and attention to detail.

The Violent Incidents Database (VID) collects information on perpetrators of incidents to better frame and understand the incident itself, the factors which led to it, and its relation to other events and incidents. The database includes details about the perpetrators' categories and their religious affiliations.

Exploring incidents which occurred in 2022–2023 suggests that the most reoccurring known perpetrator category was “Organized crime” (28 %), followed by “Government officials” (21 %), and Ethnic group leaders” (15 %). 15 % of all incident records in 2022–2023 were committed by “unknown” perpetrators. The following illustration clarifies the distribution of incidents perpetrators.

Distribution of Incident Perpetrators



While some categories appear to take 0% of the pie chart, incidents perpetrated by those who belong in these categories did take place, but these amount to less than 1 % of the whole; the following table shows aggregates of these categories.

Category	Number of Incidents
Organized crime	1205
Government officials	918
Ethnic group leaders	626
Unknown	625
Violent religious groups	448
Normal citizens	323
Ideological pressure groups	62
Revolutionaries or paramilitary groups	57
Religious leaders	21
Extended family	16
Political parties	10
Multilateral organizations	2

As for the 15 % of unknown perpetrators, in many cases they were given some sort of description within the database, but did not fit neatly into any of the categories. It would also seem that the targets were most often Christians. Nigeria will be used as an example as can be seen in the table below; it is both the country on which the most comprehensive data is available in the database, as well as the country with most cases of unknown perpetrators.

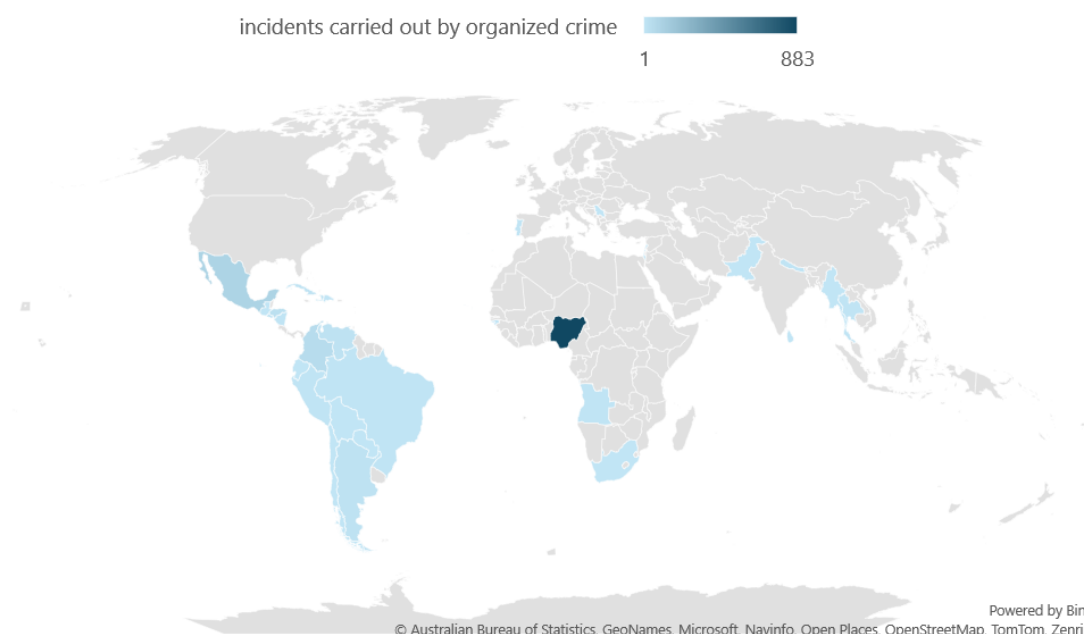
Country	Count of Country
Nigeria	491
Unknown	491
Additional – see next column	2
Islam	1
Christian	1
Armed Fulani Herdsmen	150
Christian	135
Islam	11
Other	2
Animist, ancestor worship, or traditional religion	2
Communal clash	28
Christian	19
Islam	8
Other	1
Famers Herders Clash	1

Islam	1
Gunmen	174
Christian	132
Islam	35
Animist, ancestor worship, or traditional religion	3
Unknown	2
Other	2
Multiple: Boko Haram and ISWAP	3
Islam	3
Multiple: Fulani Herdsmen and Locals	1
Christian	1
Multiple: Gunmen and Security Forces	1
Christian	1
Sea Pirates	4
Christian	4
Unknown	115
Christian	77
Islam	31
Animist, ancestor worship, or traditional religion	5
Other	2
Vigilantes	4
Islam	2
Christian	2
Zamfara Communal Militia (Nigeria)	8
Islam	8

Incidents carried out by criminal organizations occurred in 31 countries: most of which in Latin America and southern Africa. Having said that, Thailand, Pakistan, Lebanon, and Israel are also part of the list. Furthermore, these countries are also the only ones in which Christians weren't exclusively targeted. In Nepal, all four incidents were aimed at Hindu temples and included acts of looting and desecration; one incident at a temple was described in a news article, "The statue inside the Balkumari Temple at Sunakothi of Lalitpur Metropolitan City has been stolen." (Web source missing, wasn't archived on the Wayback machine either). In Beirut, Lebanon, the "Ain al-Mreisseh Mosque" was robbed, air compressors were taken, and the infrastructure was damaged (*Ain Al-Mreisseh Mosque Robbed*, 2022).

When turning to incidents perpetrated by “Ethnic group leaders,” Christians were, again, the most targeted. However, in the case of Chile, an interesting insight can be observed: in three out of the eight recorded incidents, the perpetrators are clearly indicated to be Catholic Christians. In addition, arson was the exclusive method of attack. To cite just one example: “For the third time this year the chapel of Santa Rosa de Lima in the Alto Quino sector was set on fire” (Modino, 2023).

Country	Incidents carried out by ethnic group leaders
Nigeria	583
Ethnic group leaders	583
Christian	361
Islam	193
Other	18
Animist, ancestor worship, or traditional religion	7
Unknown	4
Mexico	18
Ethnic group leaders	18
Christian	18
India	15
Ethnic group leaders	15
Christian	15
Chile	8
Ethnic group leaders	8
Christian	8
Pakistan	1
Ethnic group leaders	1
Islam	1
Argentina	1
Ethnic group leaders	1
Christian	1
Grand Total	626



Of the 10 incidents perpetrated by political parties, 40 % took place in Western European countries (Sweden, Norway and France) and were aimed at Muslims. In the Scandinavian countries, these attacks included burnings of the Quran, leading to clashes and riots (*Dozens Arrested at Sweden Riots Sparked by Planned Quran Burnings, 2022*); in France, authorities took action to uphold secularism in public education after Muslim students prayed silently during a lunch break (June 16 et al., 2023).

Country	Incidents carried out by political parties
Sweden	2
Political parties	2
Islam	2
Brazil	2
Political parties	2
Christian	2
Israel	1
Political parties	1
Christian	1
Cuba	1
Political parties	1
Other	1
Colombia	1
Political parties	1
Christian	1

Vietnam	1
Political parties	1
Christian	1
France	1
Political parties	1
Islam	1
Denmark	1
Political parties	1
Islam	1
Grand Total	10

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