



Reports

Dennis P. Petri

Subnational Insights
of the Violent Incidents Database

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International Institute
for Religious Freedom



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for Religious Freedom

**Internationales Institut für Religionsfreiheit
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The International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF) was founded in 2007 with the mission to promote religious freedom for all faiths from an academic perspective. The IIRF aspires to be an authoritative voice on religious freedom. We provide reliable and unbiased data on religious freedom – beyond anecdotal evidence – to strengthen academic research on the topic and to inform public policy at all levels. Our research results are disseminated through the International Journal for Religious Freedom and other publications. A particular emphasis of the IIRF is to encourage the study of religious freedom in university institutions through its inclusion in educational curricula and by supporting postgraduate students with research projects.

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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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Subnational Insights of the Violent Incidents Database

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Introduction

Violations of religious freedoms, and violence aimed at religious communities and sites are usually recorded and reported by the media and various research projects as part of a larger phenomenon. This creates a situation where such incidents might be overlooked or alluded to only in passing. Incidents could also be covered on a macro level, disregarding many of the variables which led to them unfolding the way they did, as well as the unique characteristics and circumstances of the incidents themselves.

The Violent Incidents Database (VID) exclusively records incidents of religious freedom violations and allows for a high degree of granularity when exploring and analyzing the data. This includes synthesizing various variables which correspond to location and its dimensions. For example, not only is the country where the incident took place recorded but also the State/Department, and when possible, the city. This enables analysis on the subnational level and facilitates comparisons between incidents of similar characteristics occurring within the same country, leading to more detailed and informed insights. The following report will provide a few examples of subnational insights using data in the VID.

When it comes to China, the most prominent example of violation of religious freedoms and religious persecution these days is the treatment of Uyghurs (a Turkic ethnic group adhering to Islam) in the Xinjiang province by the Chinese government. While the persecution of Uyghurs received vast media coverage in the West and worldwide, incidents occurring in other provinces of China or does receive less coverage, if any.

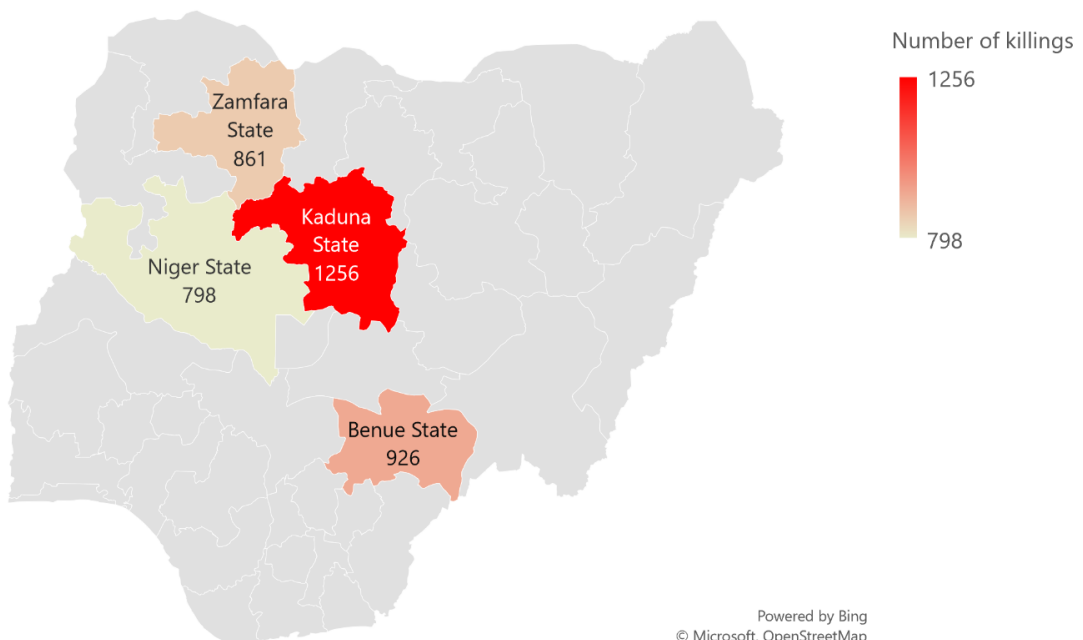
Province of China	Sum of Non-physical violence (pressure)	Sum of Arrests/ detentions	Sum of Sentences
Anhui	5	640	2
Christian	3	84	2
Other	2	556	0
Zhejiang	4	465	2
Christian	3	465	2
Other	1	0	0
Jiangsu	1	264	0
Christian	1	0	0
Other	0	263	0
Buddhist	0	1	0
Sichuan	309	64	2
Christian	309	44	0
Buddhist	0	20	2
Shanxi	32	26	10

Christian	32	26	10
Beijing	14	25	16
Christian	12	15	0
Jewish	1	0	0
Other	1	10	16
Islam	0	0	0
Yunnan	101	12	0
Christian	100	10	0
Islam	1	2	0

This table provides a shocking insight as to the treatment in various provinces of China: it is possible to observe that Christians were the most targeted in terms of nonphysical violence in each of the provinces presented, as well as for arrests/detentions in the Zhejiang, Sichuan, Shanxi, Beijing and Yunnan provinces. One can also observe that Christians were the most sentenced.

Another insight from the database is that in Nigeria, the country with the highest recorded number of killings in the VID (8152), more than 35 % of all killings were carried out in its northwestern constituent states. Below is a table with the four Nigerian states in which more than 500 killings were recorded, as well as a map to better illustrate the distribution.

State	Number of killings
Kaduna State	1256
Benue State	926
Zamfara State	861
Niger State	798



Moving to Latin America, in Argentina, only Christian sites of worship were the targets of vandalism or desecration attempts (according to the data that was collected in the VID for the years 2022–2023). The perpetrators of such attacks were—mostly—organized crime groups and individual citizens; however, the records suggest that ethnic group leaders also led attacks. According to one record: “In the midst of the conflict between Mapuche communities and national authorities in the area of Villa Mascardi, in the city of Villa Angostura province of Río Negro, two Catholic churches were vandalized with graffiti and attempted arson” (AICA.org.ar, n.d.).

Perpetrator, Target	Sum of (Attempts) to destroy, vandalize or desecrate places of worship or religious buildings
Argentina	55
Ethnic group leaders	2
Christian	2
Government officials	0
Animist, ancestor worship, or traditional religion	0
Christian	0
Ideological pressure groups	11
Christian	11
Normal citizens	16
Christian	16
Organized crime	19
Christian	19
Unknown	7
Christian	7

Using the data recorded in the VID can help generate better insights. Having access to more specific location data facilitates our knowledge of incident based on category and across states and various territories. This short report demonstrated only a few of the possibilities the VID opens up to researchers, professionals, policymakers and others who wish to track and understand religiously motivated violent incidents.

References

AICA.org.ar. (n.d.). *Condenan el vandalismo en iglesias de Villa La Angostura—AICA.org*. Retrieved May 15, 2024, from <https://aica.org/noticia-condenan-el-vandalismo-en-iglesias-de-villa-la-angostura>

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