



Reports

Dennis P. Petri

Violence against non-Christians around the world (2022–2023): October 7th as a focal point

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International Institute
for Religious Freedom



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**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.

The IIRF has a global presence with academic and advocacy partners on all continents. We perform original research and in collaboration with our partners. The IIRF is also a “meeting place” for all scholars that take an interest in religious freedom.

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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Violence against non-Christians around the world (2022–2023): October 7th as a focal point

The October 7, 2023 terrorist attack committed by Hamas and other militant religious groups against Israeli civilians (most of them Jewish non-combatants) is the most devastating and harmful attack aimed at a non-Christian group in recent memory, and indeed in the Violent Incidents Database (VID) the period of inquiry (2022–2023); the next record in terms of casualties records almost a thousand less deaths (1209 v. 280).

Christianity is the largest organized religion on earth. As such, it is a point of interest within many global projects dealing with religious freedom violations and religious violence. The Western (and mostly Christian) world is also where many of these initiatives originate from.

The VID attempts to provide a more comprehensive picture of violation of religious freedoms and religious violence worldwide by employing an open-source approach for data collection. The database enables the reporting of incidents perpetrated against religious groups by anybody in order to rectify an imbalance in coverage that could occur as a result of the varying groups invested in tracking, documenting and shining a light upon such incidents. One organization includes the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The ADL regularly probes individuals across the globe for their attitudes toward Jews and documents anti-Semitic incidents. However, as it focuses solely on Jews and attitudes toward them, it is harder to derive insights from the data in relation to other incidents and religions globally.

Exploration of incidents of violence against non-Christians using the VID will be presented below, with a specific focus on how violence against Jews unfolded in 2022 and 2023. Of all reported incidents recorded in the VID for 2022–2023, 32 % dealt with violence against non-Christians. In terms of killings, Islam and Judaism were the most affected faiths. Jews were also the second most affected by what is coded in the database as “Other forms of attack (physical or mental abuse).” In relation to the size of the religion, the violence recorded against Jewish people is astoundingly high. Below is a table of various attacks against religious faiths recorded by the database (excluding Christianity).

Type	Animist, ancestor worship, or traditional religion	Atheist	Buddhist	Hindu	Islam	Jewish	Other	Unknown	Total
Killings	345	0	23	1	4178	1209	230	1197	7183
(Attempts) to destroy, vandalize or desecrate places of worship or religious buildings	10	0	20	10	39	22	47	0	148
Closed places of worship or religious buildings	0	0	4	2	3	0	0	0	9
Arrests/detentions	8	0	102	2	547	1	3979	6	4645
Sentences	0	0	10	1	810	0	28	12	861
Abductions	311	0	0	0	4868	261	203	65	5708
Sexual assaults/harassment	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	3	6
Forced Marriages	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Other forms of attack (physical or mental abuse)	11	0	23	1	548	257	156	229	1225
Attacked houses/property of faith adherents	2	0	7	1	23	37	2	62	134
Attacked shops, businesses or institutions of faith adherents	0	0	0	0	3	0	0	2	5
Forced to leave Home	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	1014	1016
Forced to leave Country	0	0	0	1	7	0	0	2	10
Non-physical violence (pressure)	3	1	36	7	337	353	3609	842917	847263

The table provides insight into how each group was impacted by various types of violence, highlighting the mentioned imbalance. It's important to note that the open-source nature of the database likely contributes to the skewed data observed in the "unknown" category.

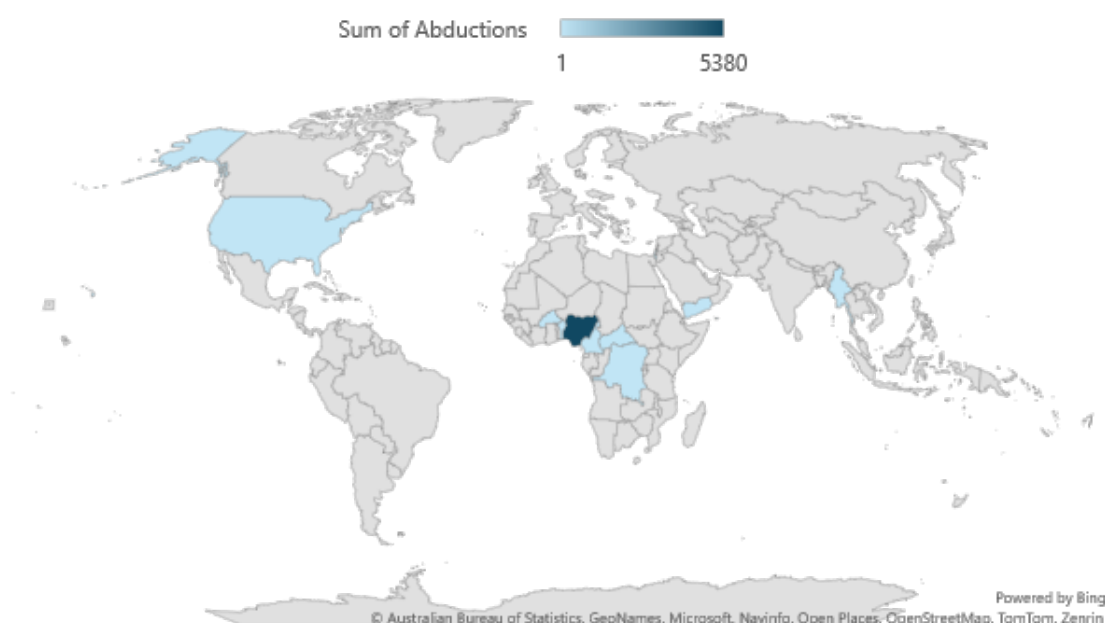
When looking at the countries in which killings took place, most countries are either predominantly Muslim or have a sizable Muslim community (Israel being the exception):

Country	Sum of Killings
Nigeria	4049
Animist, ancestor worship, or traditional religion	344
Islam	3592
Other	113
Unknown	0
Israel	1209
Islam	0
Jewish	1209
Mali	780
Islam	290
Other	0
Unknown	490
Burkina Faso	337
Islam	9
Unknown	328
Democratic Republic of the Congo	209
Unknown	209
Pakistan	126
Hindu	1
Islam	124
Other	1
Unknown	0
Afghanistan	120
Islam	120
China	104
Buddhist	1
Islam	0
Jewish	0
Other	103
Niger	69
Islam	5
Unknown	64
Burundi	44
Unknown	44

If Jews are excluded from counting, the Central African Republic enters the list with 38 individuals dead: 24 were Muslims, 13 were categorized as others and one was unknown.

Turning to abductions, Islam ranked as the most targeted faith group (4868 abductees, or 85.35 % of all abducted individuals), followed by animist and ancestor worship religions (311 abductees), and Jewish people with 261 abductees, most of whom were abducted on October 7th.

Abductions of non-Christians (2022-2023)



Country	Sum of Abductions
Nigeria	5380
Israel	261
Yemen	17
Central African Republic	15
Benin	12
Cameroon	10
Democratic Republic of the Congo	9
United States	8
Guatemala	2
Myanmar	1

While political justifications will be given to explain the attack, looking at the interplay of the religious, political and historical factors allows one to understand the intricacies of factors behind incidents better. Nigeria is an excellent example for interrogating religious, political and historical factors. Nigeria had exceptionally high rates of homicide which were mostly perpetrated by militias and terrorist groups, such as the ISWAP, Kaduna militiamen and Fulani raiders.

On April 4, 2022, it was reported that “Suspected [Fulani] herders killed a traditional ruler in Logo. Several others were injured.” The Fulani people subscribe mostly to Islam and this assassination against a traditional ruler shows both a political and religious quarrel with conflicting religious groups vying for control and ascendancy. Using incidents occurring in Nigeria, a country whose problems largely do not interest Western people, enables us to avoid the pitfalls of reductive thinking and look at the bigger picture. The same is true for other incidents of violence and conflicts between Hindus and Muslims in the United Kingdom and Indian subcontinent, and Muslims and Jews in Europe the United States and Israel.

It is important to note that there are gaps and inconsistencies in the data. And yet, the pros of the open-source approach outweigh the cons. This report demonstrates that by thoroughly analyzing open-source data—both high-profile and lesser-known incidents—with greater granularity than usual, we can uncover deeper insights into patterns of persecution often overlooked in broader coverage.

Imprint

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