

## 1.3. Demographics

### 1.3. Demographics

Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa<sup>[35](#)</sup> with an estimated population of 237 million.<sup>[36](#)</sup> The country is a culturally diverse and multi-ethnic federal state,<sup>[37](#)</sup> with a population comprising over 250 ethnic groups, each with distinct languages, cultures, religions, and beliefs. The main three ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the South-West, and the Igbo in the South-East. The Hausa and Fulani have largely integrated, with most members practising Islam; the urban Fulani intermarry and hold administrative roles in Hausa regions, while rural Fulani remain distinct and speak Fula. The Yoruba, predominantly farmers living in urban areas, maintain a structured chieftaincy system led by influential figures. The Igbo live in decentralised, democratic communities governed by councils of elders, with limited centralised authority. Other notable groups include the Ibibio and Edo in the South, and the Tiv and Nupe in the ethnically diverse Middle Belt (North-Central zone<sup>[38](#)</sup>).<sup>[39](#)</sup>

56.1 % of Nigeria's population identifies as Muslim, while 43.4 % identifies as Christian.<sup>[40](#)</sup> Other religious minorities include individuals practicing African traditional religions (8 %),<sup>[41](#)</sup> individuals with no religious affiliation, small communities of Buddhists, Hindus, and Jews. In general, Muslims predominantly reside in the northern regions of the country, whereas Christians are primarily concentrated in the south.<sup>[42](#)</sup> While religious and cultural diversity is a defining feature of Nigeria's social landscape, it has also been a source of longstanding tension, especially in areas where religious groups coexist or overlap.<sup>[43](#)</sup>

<sup>[35](#)</sup>

BBC News, Nigeria Country Profile, 28 July 2023, [url](#); Nigeria, NHRC, Freedom Of Religion And Belief In Nigeria: A Survey 2024, [url](#), p. 6

<sup>[36](#)</sup>

Population figures are based on estimates and projections from World Population Prospects 2024 and Model-based Estimates and Projections of Family Planning Indicators 2024 (UNFPA, Population Division). See UNFPA, State of the World Population Report 2025 'The Real Fertility Crisis: The pursuit of reproductive agency in a changing world', 16 June 2025, [url](#), pp. 139, 142

<sup>[37](#)</sup>

World Bank, The World Bank in Nigeria, last updated 10 April 2025, [url](#); International Crisis Group, Crisis Watch Nigeria 2024 -2025, [url](#)

<sup>[38](#)</sup>

Ojewale, O., Violence is endemic in north central Nigeria: what communities are doing to cope, The Conversation, 23 June 2021, [url](#); The term ‘Middle Belt’ usually refers to the following States: Benue, FCT, Kogi, Kwara, Nasarawa, Niger, Plateau. Source: Oasdom, List of Middle Belt States in Nigeria, 1 June 2020, [url](#); But some would also add Adamawa and Taraba, as well as ‘the southern parts of Kaduna State, Kebbi State, Bauchi State, Gombe State, Yobe State and Borno State. Source: Legit, List of Middle Belt states in Nigeria: which ones are they?, 19 September 2022, [url](#)

[39](#)

Encyclopaedia Britannica, Nigeria – People, last updated 4 July 2025, [url](#)

[40](#)

Pew Research Center, How the Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020, 9 June 2025, [url](#), pp. 49, 56

[41](#)

USCIRF, USCIRF–Recommended For Countries Of Particular Concern (Cpc), Nigeria, May 2024, [url](#)

[42](#)

Pew Research Center, How the Global Religious Landscape Changed from 2010 to 2020, 9 June 2025, [url](#), pp. 49, 56, 113, 193

[43](#)

Nigeria, NHRC, Freedom Of Religion And Belief In Nigeria: A Survey 2024, [url](#), p. 5