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Muslims of Nasarawa State: A Survey

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Abstract

This paper first gives an introduction to Nasarawa State, giving information about its population, the ethnicities of its peoples and their occupations, and estimated percentages of Muslims and Christians. The paper then moves to more detailed discussions of sects among the Muslims, the various ways Muslims are educated, and their participation in and attitudes towards politics and government. It concludes with surveys of Muslim NGOs and prominent scholars and other individuals, with specific details on three Muslim NGOs and three individual Muslims active in the state.

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1. Introduction to Nasarawa State

Nasarawa State was formerly part of Benue-Plateau State (1967-76), then part of Plateau State (1976-96) until it was carved out as a separate state by the military regime of General Sani Abacha. Its capital is Lafia. It is divided into 13 Local Government Areas (LGAs). Its population in 2006, according to the national census taken that year, was reported to be 1,863,275, making it the smallest state in the North Central Zone.

This paper is based on interviews and existing literature. We chose to interview people based on their importance either in the governance of the state, in the prominent Islamic organizations or in the society. As it can be observed (see page 12), among those interviewed we have the special assistant to the governor on religious affairs, who is also the Chief Imam of the second largest mosque in Lafia (the State capital). We also have a permanent secretary in the office of the head of civil service in the state. She is also the *Amirah* (leader) of FOMWAN, the largest Muslim women organization in Nigeria Nasarawa State branch. Others interviewed include leaders of different Muslim organizations in different local government areas in the State and leaders of some youth organizations. We also wrote all the Muslim organizations and finally narrowing down on the few ones with larger followership.

a. Ethnicity

Ethnically, Nasarawa State is extremely diverse. The tribes found here include state include Hausa, Kanuri, Fulani, Alago, Koro, Mada, Eggon, Rindre, Gwandara, Gade, Gbagyi, Mama, Toni, Yaskuwa, Bassa, Kwatto, Afo, Kwara, and many more. These trusted groups and some others that were not mentioned, all have become proper indigenes of Nasarawa State, and none of these groups are considered as settler ethnic groups in the state. The only settlers are Yoruba and Igbo people which are found in almost every town but most of them do not claim indigeneship.

b. Religion

It is difficult to estimate the percentages of Muslims, Christians and practitioners of African Traditional Religions among the people. The 1963 Nigerian census put the percentage of Muslims in what is now Nasarawa State at about 30% of the population, while about 14% were Christian and a majority of 56% adherents of “other” religions.¹ The percentage of “others” has no doubt been significantly reduced by now, with most people being either Muslims or Christians at least nominally. But how many belong to which group is not known with any precision. For purposes of this research, we made two kinds of investigation into this question. One was to determine the number of Muslims among certain categories of elected officials. The result of this was as follows:

Table 1: Muslims among current elected officials of Nasarawa State²

Gov.	Dep. Gov.	Muslims in				Total Muslim officials	% Muslim officials
		House of Assembly	L.G. Chmships	Senate	House of Reps		
Mslm	Chstn	16/24	8/13	1/3	5/6	31/48	65

¹ Based on calculations from the 1963 census results performed by Philip Ostien, see Appendix to his “Report on Nigeria’s North Central Geo-Political Zone” for this project.

² As at early March 2011, before the elections of April 2011. In the case of the Local Government Chairmanships, the data are for late 2010, before the Local Government Councils were dissolved in anticipation of new elections.

Even where they have a choice between a Muslim and a Christian candidate, of course, people do not always vote for their own co-religionist. But they often do; furthermore the religion of the candidates will often reflect the religion of the majority of people in the constituency. So these numbers give some indication of the relative numbers of Muslims and Christians among the population. Then the other investigation we made, was to make inquiries among knowledgeable residents of each of the LGAs, as to their best estimates of the percentages of Muslims living there. The results are as follows (with LGAs listed in descending order by 2006 population):

Table 2: Estimated percentages of Muslims per Nasarawa State LGA

LGA	2006 population	Est. % Muslim
Lafia	330,712	70
Karu	205,477	50
Nasarawa	189,835	80
Nasarawa Eggon	149,129	30
Obi	148,874	55
Doma	139,607	70
Toto	119,077	60
Akwanga	113,430	30
Awe	112,574	90
Kokona	109,749	50
Keffi	92,664	70
Keana	79,253	80
Wamba	72,894	60
Total Nasarawa State	1,863,275	61

The result of about 61% Muslim for the whole of Nasarawa State, calculated from the LGA estimates and 2006 population figures, is not far off from the percentage of Muslims among current elected officials.

c. Occupations

The traditional occupations of the people of Nasarawa state as everywhere in Nigeria is hunting, farming, wrestling, blacksmith, pottery among others. While a lot of the people became educated and thus we have civil servants, private professionals, politicians, businessmen etc. The most important thing to note is the fact that, in every town, village, and among all the ethnic and religious groups, we have these social stratifications. So also the people's affiliation to one or more religious group and organization and or sects cut across each and every ethnic and social group. It is difficult to attach any religious sect and or organization to e.g. civil service, farmers, business men etc.

2. Categories of Muslims

a. Overview

There are different Muslim groups in Nasarawa state. These include Sunnis, Ahmadis, some "Shia" (followers of Sheikh Ibraheem El Zakzaky of Zaria). Among these categories, Sunnis are in the vast majority: Ahmadiyya, "Shia" and Qur'aniyyun are just small minority sects in Nasarawa State. They do not command followership like the Sunnis. Unlike all the other groups, the Qur'aniyyun do not accept Sunnah or Hadith of the Prophet such as the collections in al-Bukhari, Muslim, Muwatta etc. They are not large in number and are found in Lafia. Some of them are educated, civil servants and most of them are youth.

b. Sunni groups

Among the Sunnis, there are further categories. Both of Nigeria's two main Sufi groups, the Qadiriyya and the Tijaniyya, are represented. It is very difficult to make any analysis or breakdown by ethnicity, occupation and or location. But the Qadiriyya are very small in number compared to the Tijaniyya. Probably among all the Muslims in Nasarawa State, the Tijaniyya are in the majority. There are also anti-Sufis: these are mainly the Izala. They are also large in population and they cut across ethnicity, rural and urban areas. A lot of them are educated and are civil servants. The Tijaniyya and Izala are discussed in more detail in section **5.b** below.

But the distribution of all these groups ranges across the educated and non-educated, they are found in all ethnic groups and both in the villages and cities. It is very difficult to distinguish them by language or social placement. Almost all of these sects do not know the number of their as these followers are spread around in all the villages, towns and cities.

None of these groups have a society or community of its own. None is isolated from the rest of the population of both Christians and Muslims in the state. However there is a group lead by Baban Salma that migrated from Keffi and has its settlement called Madinat al-Munawwara. They are followers of Tijaniyya order. They also have some members scattered in Mararraba and other few places. Some of them are educated and working class too. Their population is not much.

c. Inter-group relations

There is a peaceful coexistence between all the groups with each minding its activities. No clashes are recorded so far.

3. Education

a. Qur'anic schools

In almost all the towns of Nasarawa State, the traditional *almajiri* system of education is found among the Muslims. It is difficult to get numerical data. However examples can be cited from two *almajiri* schools in Keffi town, the school of the Chief Imam of Keffi and that of late Imam Malam Ali. These reveal that in these two schools taken together, 1000 got to the level of *titibiri* (adolescents), 225 got to *gardi* level (having completed memorization of the entire Qur'an), while 3215 students got to the level of *alaramma* (able to write the entire text of the Qur'an). The students in these categories, across the state, cut across ethnic groups. But most of them are children coming in from the villages to towns in search of Islamic education and some are not even from Nasarawa State but from far and wide. Examples of such coming from far and wide can be seen in Doma in a place called Tudun Wadan Alaramma, where both the teachers and the students are from Hausa lands.

b. Islamiyya schools

Islamiyya schools are of different categories. There is the one for adult literacy and that for pupils and children. The ones for the children are many and spread all over the state. There is hardly a town without an Islamiyya school. In this case, both the staff and the students are of these towns, i.e. they are indigenous. For example in Keffi there are more than 20 Islamic owned schools out of which more than 10 are awarding both primary and secondary school certificates. There are two more schools running diploma programmes, one aligned with the Institute of Education at ABU Zaria and the other with BUK Kano. All are private owned schools. While in Doma there are about 5 Islamic primary schools, out of which only one is government-owned. There are two private secondary schools and no higher institution.

There are not any government Islamic schools in Keffi either primary or secondary or tertiary. Here are the names of some Islamic schools in Lafia:

- i. Al- Iman School, Shendam Road
- ii. JIBWIS Secondary School, Abuja Street
- iii. Dunama College of Islamic Studies, Ambuna Road
- iv. Madarasatu Ta'aleemul Sibyan, Makurdi Road
- v. Fajrussadiq Islamic School, Shendam Road
- vi. Sambo Tarbiyyatul Islam, Wadata
- vii. Hayatul Iman Sarki Baba, Super Cinema Street
- viii. Ansaruddeen School, Millionaires' Quarters
- ix. Markazul Islam Islamic Centre, Makurdi Road
- x. Madinatul Ahabab, B.A.D Road

In Nasarawa State there is no College of Islamic Legal Studies, whether privately or publicly owned, but there are some private diploma-awarding schools like Al-Iman Lafia and also two in Keffi. They are all affiliated to the Institute of Education, ABU Zaria.

c. Public schools

Generally Muslims patronize the government-owned institutions at all levels, primary through tertiary and up to Ph.D. level, and the percentage of patronage is very high. Islamic Religious Knowledge is mandatory for Muslim students through Junior Secondary School 3, and optional after that, but most Muslim students pursue it through Senior Secondary 3, the final year of secondary school. Then in the tertiary institutions one can pursue Islamic studies further. For example, at Nasarawa State University Keffi there is a Department of Languages and Linguistics in which one can pursue the study of Arabic, and a Department of Religious Studies in which one can pursue Islamic Studies, in both cases up to Ph.D. level. There is no separate degree in "Civil and Islamic Law" or "Common and Islamic Law" in the Faculty of Law, but there is a Department of Islamic and Customary Law, and one can pursue concentrations in these areas at all levels of study. As indicated, many Muslim students are pursuing Arabic and Islamic studies at the tertiary level in Nasarawa State.

4. Politics and government

a. Traditional rulerships

There are many chiefdoms in the state with their rulers having either first class, second class or third class staff of office. Each of the 13 LGAs has its own paramount chief, as follows (in order of seniority within the state):

Table 3: Head chiefdoms by LGA

LGA	Paramount chief
Lafia	Emir of Lafia
Keffi	Emir of Keffi
Nasarawa	Emir of Nasarawa
Nasarawa Eggon	Aren Eggon
Doma	Andoma of Doma
Keana	Osana of Keana
Awe	Sangari Awe
Akwanga	Chun Mada
Wamba	Oriye Rindre
Toto	Ohimege Opanda
Karu	Esu Karu

Kokona	Abaga Toni
Obi	Osukwo Obi

The Emir of Lafia, who traces his lineage to the Kanem Borno Empire, is the Chairman of the Nasarawa State Council of Chiefs. But in addition to the chiefs listed, there are traditional rulers in all the towns and villages, too numerous to mention. Among the chiefdoms listed in Table 3, some are specifically Muslim (the emirates), while others arise rather from ethnic traditions. Some of the occupants of the latter chiefdoms are Muslims and some Christians, and this is true also of all the lesser traditional offices throughout the state.

b. Muslim attitudes towards the Nigerian constitution; participation in politics

Generally the Muslims in Nasarawa State have no problem with the Nigerian constitution. They are identified with it and have become part and parcel of it. The Muslims are major stakeholders in politics. As shown in Table 1 in section 1.b above, they participate in elections and are elected into offices.

The major parties in Nasarawa state are the PDP and CPC. The Muslims have championed the course of PDP right from its inception. With the coming out of CPC, they are not left behind. Party affiliation in the state is not by ethnicity or sectarianism those two variables do not effect politics. The governor is a Muslim (Aliyu Akwe Doma) from PDP. For now his only strong opponent, Alh .Tanko Umar Almakura, is also a Muslim from CPC.

c. Islam in government

In Nasarawa State the government pursues the causes of both Islam and Christianity. For example, the Governor has two advisers on religious matters, one Muslim and one Christian. There is a Muslim Pilgrims Welfare Board and a Christian Pilgrims Welfare Board. There is a Sharia Court of Appeal and a Customary Court of Appeal, the one to hear appeals from the Area Courts in matters decided under Islamic personal law, the other to hear appeals in cases decided under one or another body of customary law practiced in the state. But many of the Muslims in the state are yearning for sharia implementation as has been done in twelve states farther to the north, though the state has not instituted it.

5. Muslim NGOs

a. Overview

There are many Muslim organizations in the state. To name a few (in alphabetical order):

Alsalafiyya

Ansaruddeen Society of Nigeria

Darikatul Tijaniyya

Federation of Muslim Women Associations in Nigeria (FOMWAN)

Fityanul Islam

Jama'atu Da'wah

Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'a Wa'ikamatis Sunnah (Izala, or JIBWIS, with both the Jos and Kaduna branches represented)

Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), both male and female wing

Muslim Brothers

Muslim Lawyers Association (MULA)

Muslim Sisters Organisation (MSO)

Muslim Students Society of Nigeria (MSSN)
 Muslim Youth Foundation
 Nasrul-Lahi-L-Fatih Society of Nigeria (NASFAT)
 National Council of Muslim Youth Organisations (NACOMYO)
 Nigerian Aid Group
 Nuruddeen Society of Nigeria
 Ogbomosho Muslim Link
 Voice of Islam

The only ethnic affiliated organizations are those of the Yoruba people e.g. Ansaruddeen, NASFAT, Ogbomosho Link, and Nuruddeen. But others besides Yoruba belong to these groups and benefit from their work. All the rest are organizations to which indigenes of the state belong irrespective of ethnic background. JNI, with male and female wings, has branches all over the state. MULA is a professional organization for Muslim lawyers, Nasarawa State branch. Jama'atu Da'wah is an organization of women Islamic scholars that is engaged in teaching, conferences and lectures; it has branches all over the state. Voice of Islam is also an organization that is engaged in *da'wah* and conflict resolution among Muslims, it is based in Lafia. More detailed information on Voice of Islam and two other groups is given next.

b. Details on three groups

i. Voice of Islam

The headquarters of this group is in Lafia but it also has a branch in Keffi. Most of its members are youths. The organization was established in the early 90s in Lafia and it has become prominent because of its activities through electronic media i.e. radio, television and public lectures. The group's ideology is to bring most organizations under one umbrella and to intervene in any conflict between organizations and individuals. They maintain good relationships with the state; they also participate in the political processes.

The members occupy some specific niches within the local economy. Most of the members are civil servants, traders, and teachers. They depend on themselves in running the organization. Their membership is drawn from any other organization if he/she accepts their aims and objectives. A member can be a male or female from any ethnic group. They socialize with any other group but they don't have any school of their own as of present but they patronize other schools. They are locally oriented. They accommodate other faiths not as members but as friends, neighbours, colleagues and encourage intergroup relationships. The internal hierarchy within the group includes the Amir, Vice Amir, Amira, Vice Amira, Financial Secretary, Public Relations Officer, Treasurer, etc. and the group of scholars who carry out the *da'wah* activities.

ii. Jama'atu Izalatil Bid'a Wa'ikamatis Sunnah (Izala, or JIBWIS)

This *da'wah* group is found in all parts of the state, in the local governments and wards. The members of this organization are in every occupation, i.e. ministries, government parastatals, private sectors, markets, schools, commercial drivers, and motorcycle drivers etc. In terms of numerical strength they form about 27-30% of the Muslims in the state. The root of this organization is from Jos the capital of Plateau state. It was founded by a scholar named As-Sheikh Ismail Idris Bin Zakaria in the late 1970s. It has developed from strength to strength and they are found in some of the other West African countries e.g. Niger. This group tries to disassociate itself from other groups or individuals that are not their members.

Their ideology is to preach the Sunnah and shun innovation in the religion and that is why they are regarded as anti-Dariqah or anti-Sufism. Most of their leaders are men and they don't allow women to lead in any capacity and neither do women inter-mingle with men in any of their gatherings. They have a cordial relationship with the state and participate in all political processes and all governmental institutions, so they contest for posts and they vote and are voted for, and they have their aid group that work as their police.

This group as mentioned earlier occupies a very big niche within the local economy because they are traders, they are civil servants, they are taxi drivers, they are truck drivers, they are okada operators etc. They have schools from nursery to diploma level. Composition of membership of the group cuts across all age, gender, and ethnicities provided you are a Muslim and you believe in their ideology. The Izala group socializes with other groups and individuals but have an emphasis in education of both male and female and established schools for that purposes.

Their orientation towards other faiths in Nigeria is not bad because they buy from them and sell to them and they also live together. In other words their orientation is to call other faiths, i.e. non-Muslims, to understand and see the beauty of Islam. The internal hierarchy is divided into two: the *ulama* have their ranking from their leader who is the spiritual leader i.e. he is above all other ranks and he may have assistance; and there is also an administrative ranking e.g. chairman, secretary, publicity secretary etc.

This group has a symbol which they use in the uniforms of their aid group members, this is two swords across each other on their shoulder. The group has no distinctive ritual practices. The recruitment strategy of members or fellowship is through preaching in the mosque and public lectures. This group has been much studied by many foreign and Nigerian scholars.

iii. Darikatul Tijaniyya

These are the Tijaniyya, the largest Sufi group in Nasarawa State. We estimate that they constitute 40 to 45% of the population of Muslims in Nasarawa state They accept all other groups with the exception of Izala and they are present in all loops and corners of the state. They are a very peaceful group and they accommodate and relate very well with most other Islamic groups and individuals. The ideology is that they accept constituted authority and institutions and they respect gender.

As to the relationship of the group with the state and formal political institutions: they are members of all the political parties in the state. For example, the Governor is a member of the group and so are many legislators and commissioners and some prominent emirs in the state.

6. Notable individuals

a. The Emirs

The three Emirs in the state, of Lafia, Keffi and Nasarawa, are the voice of their communities and their subjects listen to them at any point in time, in politics, religion and social matters. So these Emirs are the controllers of their people in their domains. That is why in Nasarawa State all politicians rely on their Emirs for success and most of the scholars within the state including the organizations respect the Emirs and listen to them.

b. List of some other influential Muslims and Muslim scholars

There are many influential Muslim leaders and scholars in the state. Here is a list of twelve of them, three of whom are discussed in more detail in the following subsection:

Scholars:

Mal. Musa Mai Sunan Malam, Lafia town

Sheikh Muhammad M. Sarki, Lafia town

Imams:

Ustaz Muhammad Ibrahim Arikia, Chief Imam, State Secretariat Central Mosque, Lafia town

Sheikh Ibrahim Dahir, Chief Imam, College of Agriculture Central Mosque, Lafia town

Sheikh Muhammad Dahir, Chief Imam, Nigerian Police Force, Nasarawa State Command, Lafia town

Sheikh Dalhatu Dahiru, Chief Imam, Angwan Fada Central Mosque, Lafia town

Sheikh Abdbullahi Liman Gabas, Chief Imam, Kofar Gabas Central Mosque, Lafia town

Leaders of Muslim groups:

Ustaz Shu'aibu Isma'il, State Chairman, JIBWIS, Lafia town

Ustaz Suraj Alhaji Sabo, State Vice Chairman I, JIBWIS, Keffi town

Ustaz Khalid Yusuf, State Vice Chairman II, JIBWIS, Lafia town

Hajiya Zainab Talatu Abdulmu'min, State Amirah, FOMWAN, Nasarawa State

Government officials:

Ustaz Muhammad Auwal Ali, Special Assistant to the Governor on Islamic Affairs, Lafia town

c. Details on three individuals

i. Ustaz Muhammad Auwal Ali, Special Assistant to the Governor on Islamic Affairs

Alh. Muhammad A. Ali was born on the 20th January, 1960 in Lafia, the capital of Nasarawa State, where he hails from. He attended Dunama and Mairafi Primary Schools from 1966-1971. He has his post-primary education at Commonwealth College of Commerce, Jos Plateau State from 1974-1985, and Government Teachers' Collage, Obi-Lafia from 1975-1979 where he obtained his Grade II NCE certificate. Malam Ali proceeded to the School of General Studies, Bayero University, Kano in 1983. He also attended the School of Preliminary Studies, Keffi in 1987. He again, went to ABU, Zaria where he obtained a Diploma in Civil Law 1990. He had his B.Sc. in Political Science by 1994 and was awarded Masters in International Law and Diplomacy from the University of Jos subsequently. Malam Ali also had a Diploma in Arabic Language at ABU, Zaria in 2008. He is currently rounding up his PhD programme in International Relations at the University of Abuja. He obviously has a thirst for education and scholarship. Among the papers he had presented during his PhD programme is "*The Aftermath Encroachment of Sovereign Nations of Iraq and Afghanistan by United States of America and their Allied Forces*".

Alh. Muhammad A. Ali was a class teacher and subsequently a school supervisor with Lafia Local Government Education Authority from 1979 till he secured employment with the NYSC in 1989 where he served in various capacities up to the level of Assistant Director which he occupied before his recent appointment as Special Assistant to the Governor of

Nasarawa State on Islamic Affairs. During his service with the NYSC, he was appointed by Nasarawa State Government as follows:

- i. Executive Chairman, Nasarawa State Pensions Board from 2001- 2004;
- ii. Deputy Imam, Masallacin Gabas, Lafia;
- iii. Special Adviser to Gov. Aliyu Akwe Doma on Religious Affairs.

Alh. Muhammad Auwal Ali resides at o/c Late Malam Ali Na Malam Adamu's House, Unguwar Liman, Lafia. He could be contacted through the Office of Chief of Staff, Government House, Lafia.

ii. Hajiya Zainab Talatu Abdulmu'min, Nasarawa State Amirah, FOMWAN and Permanent Secretary, Nasarawa State Civil Service

Hajiya Abdulmu'min was born on 11th April, 1962. She is an indigene of Nasarawa town, Nasarawa LGA, Hausa/Fulani by tribe. Her father is a retired civil servant, a former permanent secretary to be specific. She went to public primary school, after which she proceeded to St. Louis College, Jos Plateau State between the periods of 1975-1980. She was admitted into University of Jos to study English Education, in which she obtained B.Ed. in 1986. During her National Youth Service (NYSC), she served in the School of Nursing and Midwifery, Sokoto in 1986-1987. Had her Master's degree (M. Ed. English) in 1992 from the same University. She is presently undertaking a Ph.D. programme in University of Maiduguri. She was an English lecturer with the Federal Polytechnic Nasarawa from 1987-2005. She was later appointed a permanent secretary in 2005 and posted to the office of the Head of Civil Service, Lafia Nasarawa State, a position she is still holding to date. In 2004, she became the Amirah of the Nasarawa Local Government branch of FOMWAN. She was nominated a State Na'ibat Amirah in 2006, and became the State Amirah in 2007 to date. She is also the Adviser to Women in Da'wah in Nasarawa State from 2008. Women in Da'wah is an international organization of women Islamic scholars in Nigeria with branches all over. They preach to women on both spiritual and social aspects of life. They usually have a national conference once a year. The headquarters is in Abuja.

iii. Ustaz Suraj Alhaji Sabo, State Vice Chairman I, JIBWIS

Ustaz Sabo was born on 12th May, 1965 in Keffi town. He did his primary, secondary and university all in Keffi town as follows: Ahmadu Maikwato Primary School from 1973-1979; Government Teachers College Keffi (now Federal Government College) from 1979-1984; and he obtained B.Ed. in English in 2006. He also has an NCE Certificate from Kaduna State College of Education in 1989. He has travelled all over the country attending and representing his organization in their meetings, gatherings and also presented papers in some occasions their seminars. He is presently the principal of Asasul Islam School of JIBWIS in Keffi.

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