

# NO PROTEST ALLOWED

*A Profile of Nigeria's Governor El-Rufai and How He Punishes Dissent in Kaduna State*

Jay Church

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INTERNATIONAL CHRISTIAN CONCERN

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KADUNA STATE*



*On the cover: Governor Nasir El-Rufai attends a military parade,  
in a picture taken from his personal Instagram account*

International Christian Concern  
P. O. Box 8056  
Silver Spring, MD 20907  
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*For interviews, please contact [press@persecution.org](mailto:press@persecution.org).*

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# NO PROTEST ALLOWED

## A PROFILE OF NIGERIA'S GOVERNOR EL-RUFAI AND HOW HE PUNISHES DISSENT IN KADUNA STATE

It was within a few minutes of sunset—slated for 6:14 that day—on Christmas Eve 2016 when Fulani militants stormed the village of Goska in central Nigeria's Kaduna State. The assault didn't last long, but before disappearing into the dim brush surrounding Goska, the Fulani militant attackers managed to burn eighty houses and wound dozens of villagers. [Fourteen villagers died](#), including women and children.

The attack attracted international attention because it happened while Goska was rendered helpless by Kaduna State Governor Nasir El-Rufai, who, just five days prior, had ordered the residents of the Jema'a Local Government Area (LGA) where Goska is located into complete lockdown.

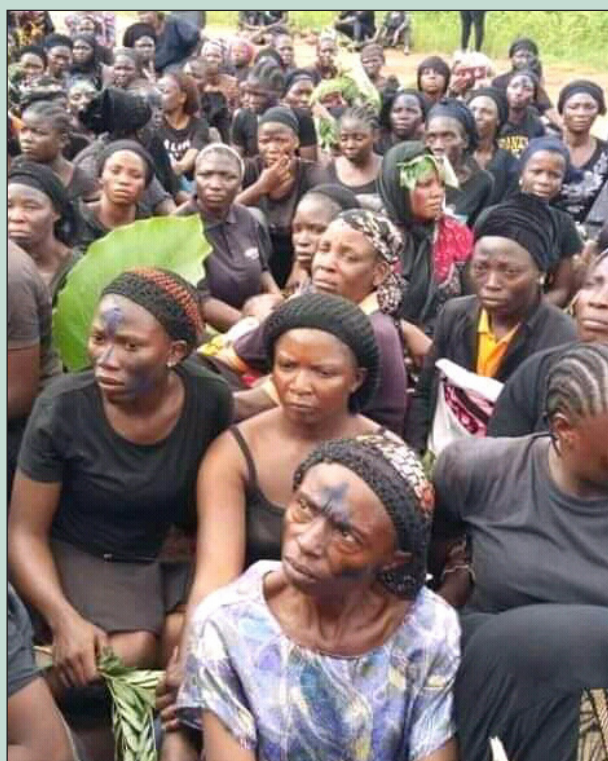
The lockdown, ostensibly designed to prevent attacks by banning all movement, was enacted after protests of the El-Rufai administration's lackluster response to violence in Jema'a. The month leading up to the attack saw [102 people killed, 215 injured, and an estimated 50,000 houses burned](#) across twenty-five Christian farming communities in Jema'a, a jurisdiction smaller than the city of Houston. However, El-Rufai's administration only enforced the Goska lockdown against villagers, who [reported](#) that members of nomadic Fulani groups moved about freely in the days leading up to the attack.

Despite international condemnation of the lockdown in Jema'a, El-Rufai has imposed at least six lockdowns since the 2016 attack. In a pattern now all too familiar, villagers protest the lack of security provided by the El-Rufai administration and El-Rufai responds to protesting communities by locking them down. These lockdown orders make it impossible for villagers to organize early warning systems, making militant attacks even more deadly as villagers no longer have the warning they need to flee into the bush.

Though there is no direct evidence to prove that El-Rufai ordered these attacks, his continued imperiling of protesting villages—even in the face of the hundreds of deaths his lockdowns have produced over the years—violates international human rights law. International Christian Concern (ICC) has engaged with the U.S. Departments of State and Treasury to suggest a visa ban and sanctions on El-Rufai for his continued lockdowns on Christian communities in Kaduna.

Three groups are primarily responsible for the violence in Nigeria: Islamic State, Boko Haram, and Fulani militants. The Nigerian government's response to Islamic State and Boko Haram has proved ineffective, but its response to the issue of Fulani militancy has been outright negligent. This report looks at just one aspect of this negligent response, in Kaduna under El-Rufai, but the problem extends across the country.

El-Rufai deserves to be censured by the international community. Sanctions should be imposed on him to discourage him from continuing to endanger communities in Kaduna.



Women protest a government-imposed lockdown in Zango Kataf in August, 2021. Approximately 122 villagers were killed between mid-June and mid-August 2021 while under El-Rufai's lockdown orders.



# WHO IS NASIR EL-RUFAI?

## *Political Background*

Before becoming involved in politics, El-Rufai amassed a sizeable personal fortune as founder of El-Rufai and Partners, a construction consulting firm which he managed with several others during the military juntas of the 1980s and 1990s. It is unknown where he keeps these earnings, but he has lived in the United States and the United Kingdom since that time and is thus likely to have financial interests in banks tied to the American financial system.

El-Rufai left the country in 2008 after prosecutors brought an eight-count charge of criminal conspiracy and abuse of his position as Minister of the Federal Capital Territory. Among other charges, El-Rufai was accused of improperly transferring property from its original owners to his wife and being involved in the disappearance of ₦32 billion (approximately \$245 million at 2010 rates) missing from the proceeds of the sale of government houses. He returned to Nigeria in 2010 and faced renewed charges but was released af-



Nasir and one of his three wives, Hadiza, at the St. Regis Mauritius Resort, where rooms cost an average of \$655 per night, according to Google analytics.

***We are waiting for the person who will come and intervene. They will go back in body bags because nobody will come to Nigeria and tell us how to run our country."***

—Nasir El-Rufai on international election observers

ter posting a ₦100 million bail (approximately \$645,000 at 2010 rates) and producing property worth ₦50 million (approximately \$322,000 at 2010 rates) as surety.

In his time out of the country, which lasted from 2008 to 2010, he apparently earned both a law degree from the University of London and a master's degree in public administration from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government.

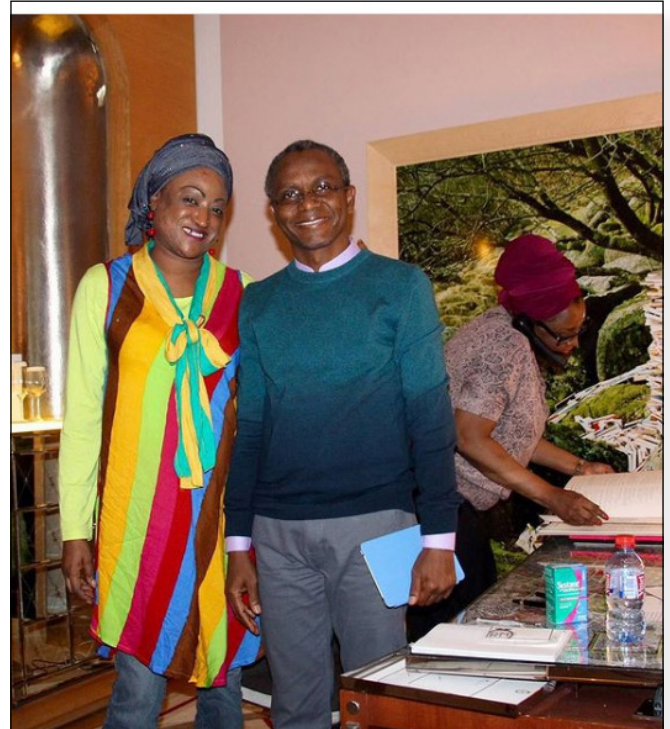
El-Rufai ran for Governor of Kaduna State in 2014 under the flag of the All Progressives Congress, a national political party he helped lead as Deputy National Secretary. He won that election and took office in May of 2015. He ran again for a second four-year term in 2018, winning the March 2019 election and ensuring his position into 2023. At that point, he will meet the state's two-term limit.

In late 2021, El-Rufai revived an antiquated rule from Nigeria's years under military dictatorship to regulate religious leaders and religious teaching in Kaduna. The renewed the Religious Preaching Edict of 1984 criminalizes preaching without authorization and aims to control who can preach and the content of their sermons.

The legislation empowers an Interfaith Preaching Regulatory Council to implement the regulations. "Anyone who doesn't follow this procedure and begins to preach without authorization will be liable to pay a fine and



Nasir El-Rufai enjoys Chinese food in London in this photo uploaded to Instagram by Asia El-Rufai, one of his wives, on August 13, 2021.



Nasir El-Rufai, one of his three wives Hadiza (background), and another woman in Paris in a photo uploaded to Instagram in 2015.

may even be imprisoned," El-Rufai said in an interview.

Justifying the need for these new regulations, El-Rufai claimed that *"most times, it is preachers that are the worst culprits"* and insisted that *"before someone can start preaching, he should be very knowledgeable, [and have] understanding and experience to preach in a manner that will bring about peaceful coexistence"* as judged by the Council. *"The council will have to certify whoever wants to preach in Kaduna state as having the requisite knowledge, temperament, experience, and foresight."*

China, which has invested heavily in Nigeria in recent years, also regulates religious teaching and claims the authority to approve or disapprove pastors. There, official approval is based on loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party. In Nigeria, the standards for approval are less clear. Still, the regulations in Kaduna bear an uncanny resemblance to China's oppressive laws both in function and in the government's official reasoning, that it is necessary for public safety.

### Personal Wealth

When considering potential sanctions, the U.S. Depart-

ments of State and Treasury consider how a possible sanction might change real-world behavior. Part of that calculus is whether a sanction would impact the human rights violator. In El-Rufai's case, ICC believes that sanctions are not just appropriate but would also be effective against El-Rufai in limiting his ability to do travel and do business internationally. They would also curtail his and his family's visits to the U.S. and their ability to enjoy the benefits of the U.S. financial system. And finally, sanctions might limit El-Rufai's rumored potential as an APC nominee for the 2023 presidential election.

The social media accounts of El-Rufai's three wives—Hadiza, Asia, and Ummi—reveal much about the family's lifestyle. Trips to New York City, Caribbean cruises out of Fort Lauderdale, Paris shopping trips, writing

***The Fulani have nothing to fear, since a Fulani [is] now governor of the state."***

—Nasir El-Rufai



retreats on the English coast, and vacations to Dubai, Santorini, Algarve, and Mauritius are all well documented on their and their children's Instagram accounts. A careful look at the El-Rufai family's social media gives a glimpse into his family's luxurious lifestyle. ICC analysts noted at least twenty-eight El-Rufai family trips abroad since 2014, the year El-Rufai first ran for governor.

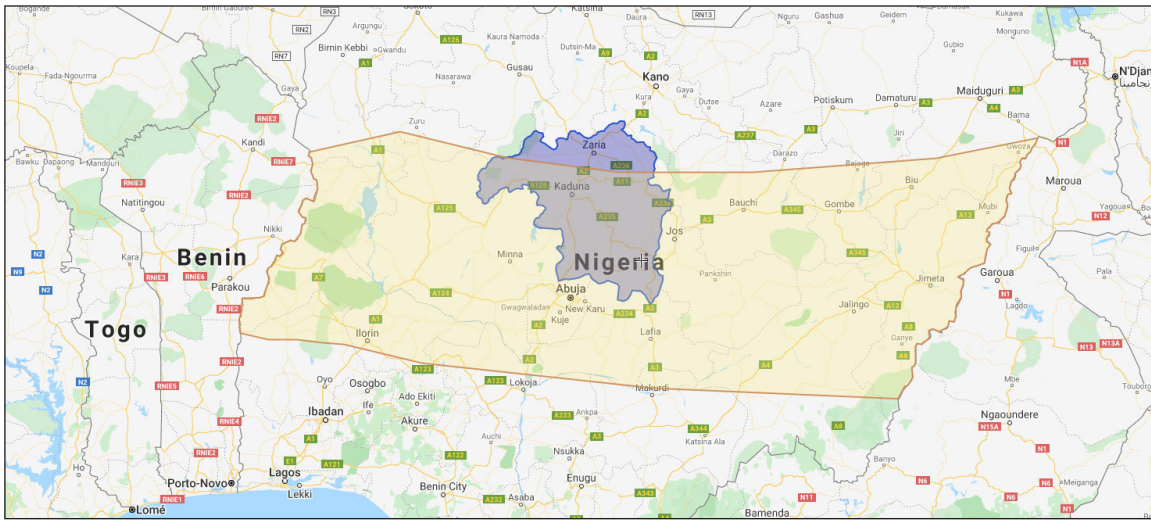
As mentioned above, El-Rufai was charged in 2008 with improperly transferring property from its owners to his wife and being involved in the disappearance of ₦32 billion missing from the proceeds of the sale of government houses. After fleeing the country for a time, he returned to Nigeria. He was allowed to walk free after posting a ₦100 million bail and producing property worth ₦50 million as surety. His ability to produce these large sums of money is further evidence of his wealth.

El-Rufai hired KRL International, a political lobbying firm in 2007. He entered two contracts with them that year: one for \$17,500 and another for \$60,000. In addition, El-Rufai retained Amsterdam and Partners, LLP in 2009 to represent him on corruption charges. Amsterdam and Partners has offices in Washington, D.C. and London. Though some have pointed to a glowing September 2021 Economist piece as an example of his continued influence abroad, the claim that El-Rufai lobbied the Economist has not been substantiated.

Between his wealth and his family's frequent travels, ICC believes that El-Rufai would be highly impacted by sanctions—especially if they were multilateral and restricted El-Rufai's travel not only to the United States but to other likeminded countries as well.



An Instagram screenshot (L) shows Hadiza El-Rufai and two others at La Vallée Village, an upscale outlet shopping mall near Paris in a photo taken on the same day as the photo of Nasir El-Rufai in Paris on page 3. A [Google Streetview screenshot](#) found by ICC researchers (R) reveals the location of the previous photo and illustrates one of the open-source research techniques ICC researchers used to geolocate and verify information in this report.



*A map roughly outlining the fractious Middle Belt region of Nigeria in yellow. El-Rufai's Kaduna State, highlighted in blue, is located in the center of the Middle Belt.*

## WHAT IS THE CRISIS IN NIGERIA?

Relatively new to democracy, Nigeria goes to great effort to cast itself as a beleaguered nation struggling valiantly against sectarian violence. Secular democracy, the narrative goes, is the guiding principle governing Nigeria—any deviation from that is the fault of malicious nonstate actors intending to spoil what they cannot control.

Nigeria does suffer from sectarian violence—it is estimated that Boko Haram is responsible for over 35,000 deaths and that Fulani militants have killed from 20,000–50,000 in the last decade or so—but the idea that the government is an impartial player doing its best to promote justice and freedom for all is simply wrong.

While the government does make some effort to combat Islamist terrorism, [a third of states have adopted Sharia criminal law](#), allowing religious courts to hand down severe physical punishments for religious offenses such as insulting the prophet Mohammed and converting from Islam.

Christian communities in the Muslim-majority north and the fractious so-called Middle Belt region in the center of the country face the compounded threat of militant violence and state governments unwilling to

bring justice to communities victimized by sectarian aggression.

Ethnicity, religion, and livelihood are often interconnected in the areas most impacted by the violence, deepening the divide and increasing the hostility on all fronts when tensions rise over one element. For example, villages in the Middle Belt are predominantly populated by Christian farmers, while nomadic groups are mainly Muslim Fulani herders.

Recent years have seen a sharp increase in violent attacks by Fulani militants on Christian farming communities in Nigeria. Tens of thousands of villagers have been killed, and hundreds of thousands of homes have been burned by Fulani militants.

The government's response to the violence has been inequitable at best. For example, El-Rufai has consistently condemned the Christian parents of kidnapped children for paying ransom money to regain their children. Still, El-Rufai boasted in an interview that he had personal contact with attacking Fulani communities and had sent them money for losses they had sustained rather than bring them to justice.





*An Instagram screenshot showing several members of the El-Rufai family in New York City's Central Park around sunset. This photo can be geolocated to [40°46'05.71"N 73°58'26.10"W](#). The El-Rufai family's regular travels to the U.S., Canada, and Europe indicate that sanctions would have a real impact on their lifestyle.*

## EL-RUFAI'S LOCKDOWNS IN KADUNA STATE

The incidents described below each began with villagers protesting the lack of security provided by El-Rufai's administration. In response, El-Rufai ordered the villages into strict lockdown, enforcing the orders with armed guards and not allowing farmers to leave their homes even to care for their crops and animals. The lockdowns lasted for days, weeks, or months and each preceded a deadly Fulani attack during which security forces mysteriously disappeared.

The pattern of attacks following El-Rufai's lockdowns is so pronounced that some local leaders work to smuggle Christians out of locked-down areas as soon as lock-

down orders are imposed, knowing that an attack is imminent. Kaduna State Senator David Lah expressed concern about the severity of the lockdowns after the Goska attacks in 2016, arguing that they could not have been intended for security but rather were imposed as a punitive measure for the protests.

This report includes case studies of two lockdown attacks. The first occurred in Goska, Jema'a LGA, in December of 2016. The second occurred in two villages along the border shared by Zangon Kataf and Kaura in 2020. These are just two of many instances within a larger trend under El-Rufai's tenure as governor.

## Goska, Jema'a LGA

Throughout the latter half of 2016, the Jema'a LGA was barraged with near-constant attacks resulting in killings in October, November, and early December. The Christian Association of Nigeria estimates that 102 people were killed, 215 were injured, and 50,000 houses were burned across 25 Christian communities in the Jema'a LGA in November alone.

The attacks in the predominantly Christian villages of Godagda and Gidan Waya were particularly brutal. In a rare occurrence, El-Rufai even personally visited one of the villages to show his sympathy. However, El-Rufai was met with protests, and he released no official statement concerning the attacks. Eight Christian leaders from that LGA were charged in December 2016 for killing Fulani herders, but no Fulani arrests were made.

While narrating the Christmas Eve incident to ICC at the Village Head Hall in a November 2021 interview, ASP Danjuma Aura Rtd. spoke about his community's history with the Fulani people. *"Historically there have been some conflicts between the natives and the agrarian Fulani herders in the village about destruction of crops," he said. "But such issues have always been settled without necessarily killing anyone."*

In the leadup to the 2016 attacks, Danjuma said, *"we received a written letter addressed 'to Goska.' Our youth picked the letter on the ground, out of curiosity. They read and called the attention of the community leaders who did same."* The letter was written in the Hausa language and threatened Goska with violence, according to Danjuma.

*"We wrote to the police and the army amongst other appropriate agencies informing them of the threat of attack by the Fulani ahead of the incident,"* Danjuma said. *"To our dismay, nothing was done by the security agents to avert the evil plan until we were attacked."*

In mid-December 2016, El-Rufai imposed a complete lockdown on Jema'a, extending from December 19 into



*As the security situation worsened in Goska in late 2016, Hadiza El-Rufai was in Merrickville-Wolford, Canada dropping off one of the El-Rufai children at Merrick Preparatory College (then Fulford Prep), an exclusive secondary school. Annual tuition there is about \$44,000 USD.*

early 2017. As with any such lockdown, this rendered the villagers incapable of organizing for self defense and made it impossible for them to keep watch for incoming attackers. The lockdown order rendered the villagers helpless and an easy target for extremist Fulani militants.

On December 24, Fulani militants attacked Jema'a, killing eleven in Goska and burning several people in their homes. Others are reported to have died of their injuries later. El-Rufai ordered this lockdown even though Fulani militants had frequently attacked in the preceding months and had been spotted in the surrounding areas for three days before El-Rufai imposed the lockdown.

It remains unknown where government security officers were during the attack on Goska. According to eyewitnesses, they were present to enforce the lockdown but did nothing to prevent the attack.

El-Rufai received significant public backlash for his role



in the deadly attack in Jema'a. Still, despite the criticism, he continued to use lockdowns, including in the months immediately following. For example, on February 21, 2017, he placed the Jema'a and Kaura LGAs into lockdown despite local leaders' protests that the lockdown made them more vulnerable. The area continued to experience severe attacks. A complete lockdown was again imposed in October of 2018, following sectarian violence in Kasuwan Magani.

### **Zangon Kataf and Kaura LGAs**

The deadliest lockdown order occurred in the summer of 2020 in the Zangon Kataf and Kaura LGAs. Governor El-Rufai placed the Zango Kataf and Kaura LGAs under lockdown on June 11, immediately following the discovery of the body of Moses Yusuf, a young Christian teacher. Yusuf had been murdered by militant Fulani herdsmen while tending to his farm. The lockdown order remained in effect for over two months before finally being relaxed on August 22 to merely prohibit movement from 6 pm to 6 am.

In an area like the Zango Kataf LGA, where farming is

***There are one or two [Fulani communities] that asked for monetary compensation... We said no problem, and we paid some."***

—Nasir El-Rufai

widespread, these lockdowns not only make communities vulnerable to attack, but they also deprive law-abiding farmers of their livelihood. June and July are the rainy months in Kaduna—a critical time for farmers to be in their fields.

Approximately 120 people were killed during this period while under El-Rufai's lockdown orders: On July 10, 2020, twenty-four villagers were killed in Sabon Kaura and Chibob villages along the border between Zango Kataf and Kaura. On July 11, twenty more were killed by Fulani in the Chibuak and Kigudu communities. Nineteen more were killed in Kukum Daji by the Fulani on



A photo uploaded by Asia, one of Nasir El-Rufai's three wives, showing her and two other women in Santorini, Greece. The photo can be geolocated to the V Lounge Cafe & Cocktail Bar by comparing features in this photo to features in [owner-uploaded](#) and [guest](#) imagery.



One in a series of photos posted by Hadiza, one of Nasir El-Rufai's three wives, showing her at a port of call on a [jazz cruise](#) that began and ended in Fort Lauderdale, FL. The El-Rufai family's regular travel to the U.S. indicate that sanctions would have a real impact on their lifestyle.



July 19 while attending a wedding party. On July 20, the Daily Post reports, Fulani killed eleven more in an attack on Gora Gan village in Zangon Kataf. Fulani militants killed thirty-three more in the Atyap villages of Apyiashyim, Atak'mawai, Kibori, and Kurmin Masara. Numerous people, predominantly women and children, were killed when more attacks began on August 5.

Security officers were sent to the Zango Kataf LGA to enforce El-Rufai's oppressive lockdown. Yet, despite

being powerful enough to enforce a monthslong lockdown so strictly implemented as to threaten the starvation

of thousands, the police repeatedly failed to protect the Zangon Kataf and Kaura LGA from Fulani attacks. According to ICC sources, the presence of Fulani herdsmen outdoors during lockdown hours was well known in the area, but security forces did nothing. At least four mem-



*El-Rufai publicly threatens anyone who might kill a member of the Fulani community, even if the incident occurs as part of a legitimate law-enforcement operation. Christian communities in Kaduna have received little protection from the military when attacked by Fulani militants.*

bers of the Zangon Kataf community were arrested and held without bail for violating the lockdown to work their farms.

## EL-RUFAI'S RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS VIOLENCE IN KADUNA

During the unrest in Goska, El-Rufai released a statement claiming that the Fulani were from Cameroon and Niger and that he had located the attackers and paid them compensation for losses they claimed to have sustained during the unrest. El-Rufai's comments were designed to cast him as a justice-oriented leader trying to stop the killings creatively. However, the fact that he personally knew who the attackers were, engaged in conversation and financial transactions with them, and then let them go without any attempt at justice continues to raise concern.

*"We got a group of people that were going round trying to trace some of these people in Cameroon, Niger Republic and so on to tell them that there is a new governor who is Fulani like them and has no problem paying compensations for lives lost and he is begging them to stop killing... There are one or two [Fulani communities] that asked for monetary compensation... We said no problem, and we paid some."*

This statement is particularly insidious in light of a post by El-Rufai on Twitter in July 2012 threatening anyone who might challenge the Fulani, even in the line of military duty: *"We will write this for all to read. Anyone, soldier or not that kills the Fulani takes a loan payable one day no matter how long it takes."* When he took office as governor in 2015, he said that *"the Fulani have nothing to fear, since a Fulani [is] now governor of the state."* These statements, taken together, help illuminate the permissive context El-Rufai has created in which so many Christians are dying at the hands of Fulani militants.

Peddling a conspiracy theory that international election observers might try to interfere in Nigeria's elections, El-Rufai threatened that *"they will go back in body bags because nobody will come to Nigeria and tell us how to run our country."*

El-Rufai claimed, in a tweet posted on September 8, 2014, that Christians were behind Boko Haram, fund-

ing and controlling it *"to tarnish the name of Islam."* In his tweet, he specifically accused the Christian Association of Nigeria and other Christians of being behind numerous church bombings and shootings. However, far from a front for the Christian Association of Nigeria, Boko Haram is an Islamist terror group with strong ties to Islamic State.

In the days leading up to his 2019 reelection, El-Rufai whipped up public anger and physical violence when he falsely claimed that 130 Fulani had been killed in Kajuru, a locality near the capital city Kaduna. Many,

including the National Emergency Management Agency and El-Rufai's own Commissioner of Police, denied his claims of an attack on the Fulani. In fact, eleven native Catholics were killed in Kajuru a few days before his comments. In the month following El-Rufai's statement, suspected Fulani militants killed 127 people in Kajuru in what presumably were reprisal attacks.

Regardless of El-Rufai's record of deceit, it has been rumored for years that El-Rufai may run for president after his time as governor, though he denies this.



A member of the El-Rufai family at the Burj Al Arab hotel in Dubai. In another post he identifies the drink as a [French-made sparkling apple juice](#) with 24k gold flakes.

## TARGETED HUMAN RIGHTS SANCTIONS IN THE U.S.

The U.S. government employs two primary sanctions regimes relevant to the kinds of serious human rights abuses perpetrated by El-Rufai: the Global Magnitsky Human Rights Accountability Act of 2016 ("GMA") and Section 7031(c) of the Further Consolidated Appropriations Act ("7031(c)"). Other smaller, narrower, or less-used authorities also exist, but the GMA and 7031(c) are the two main ones.

The GMA allows the Departments of State and Treasury to ban the visas and freeze the assets of persons who

have engaged in *"serious human rights abuses."* 7031(c) allows the Department of State to ban the visas of foreign government officials who have been involved in *"a gross violation of human rights."* While the difference between "serious" and "gross" human rights abuses is not well defined, "serious" violations are generally considered to cover a broader range of offenses.

As ICC has argued in previous correspondence with the Departments of State and Treasury, Governor El-Rufai's continued use of lockdowns on protesting communi-

ties in the face of a consistent pattern wherein these lockdowns lead to deaths is a gross human rights violation. ICC continues to push for El-Rufai to be sanctioned under the GMA and 7031(c) and believes he has likely already been flagged in the State Department visa processing system. Though some sanctions are kept private, ICC urges the Departments of State and Treasury to sanction El-Rufai publicly as a warning to him and others in his position.

ICC believes that El-Rufai should be sanctioned under

the Global Magnitsky Act and similar sanctions regimes worldwide. A public sanction on El-Rufai for his persecution of Christians through lockdowns would send a strong message to him and other officials in his position.

Even without an official sanction, governments and private organizations can publicize El-Rufai's actions for the world to see. Exposure itself could very well hinder El-Rufai's future plans and may even lead to quiet government sanctions that are not released to the public.





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