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Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy

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SUMMARY

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Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy

Overview. Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, largest economy, and leading oil producer. Successive U.S. Administrations have described the U.S.-Nigeria relationship as among the most important in sub-Saharan Africa: the country is the United States' second-largest trading partner and third-largest destination for U.S. foreign direct investment in the region, and it routinely ranks among the top annual recipients of U.S. foreign aid globally. Nigeria plays a major political and economic role in Africa and wields influence regionally. Nigerians make up the largest African-born population in the United States, generating billions of dollars in annual remittance outflows.

Governance. Nigeria has been a multiparty democracy since 1999, after decades of military rule. Governance conditions have broadly improved over the past two decades, yet corruption, ethno-religious tensions, security force abuses, discrimination against women and sexual minorities, and government harassment of political opponents and journalists remain key challenges. In 2015, Nigeria underwent its first democratic transfer of power between political parties when former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari won office on a groundswell of discontent over corruption, economic malaise, and rising insecurity. Buhari won reelection in 2019, in elections that featured historically low turnout, pervasive vote buying, and widespread violence and heightened concerns over Nigeria's democratic trajectory.

Security. Nigeria faces security challenges on several fronts. In the northeast, conflict between the military and two U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs)—Boko Haram and an Islamic State-affiliated splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP)—has killed tens of thousands over the past decade, displaced millions, and caused a protracted humanitarian crisis. The conflict also has destabilized adjacent areas of Niger, Chad, and Cameroon in the wider Lake Chad Basin region. In Nigeria's northwest, conflict between pastoralists and farmers recently has escalated amid a broader deterioration in security conditions involving cattle rustling, kidnapping, ethnic massacres, and emergent Islamist extremist activity. Farmer-herder violence also has surged in the central Middle Belt, where disputes over resource access coincide with ethno-religious cleavages between Christian and Muslim communities. In the south, criminality and militancy in the oil-rich Niger Delta have impeded development and contributed to insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea for decades.

Economy. With massive oil reserves, extensive potential in the agriculture and service sectors, and a youthful, rapidly growing population, Nigeria is equipped to emerge as a global economic powerhouse. Yet corruption, infrastructure gaps, insecurity, and a failure to diversify the economy away from petroleum production have constrained economic growth and development. The economy is poised to enter a deep recession in 2020—its second contraction in five years—amid a global oil price collapse and disruptions linked to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic. The International Monetary Fund projects Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) to decline by 5.4% in 2020, with severe implications for economic livelihoods and government finances. Nigeria already ranks among the world's least developed countries across a range of indicators: according to some estimates, Nigeria is home to the world's largest population living in extreme poverty.

U.S. Engagement. U.S.-Nigeria relations are extensive by regional standards, encompassing a U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission and other bilateral engagements, significant commercial linkages, and considerable people-to-people ties. President Trump's phone call to President Buhari in 2017 was his first to any sub-Saharan African leader, and in 2018, Buhari became the first sub-Saharan African leader to meet with President Trump at the White House. U.S. concerns over human rights conditions in Nigeria periodically have strained ties and impeded security cooperation; in recent years, some Members of Congress have expressed particular concern with military abuses against civilians, along with deteriorating press and religious freedoms. The State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) allocated over $450 million in FY2020 bilateral foreign assistance for Nigeria, supporting programs focused on health, good governance, agricultural development, and law enforcement and justice sector strengthening. This does not include substantial emergency assistance provided in response to the humanitarian crisis in the northeast, or funds administered by other U.S. federal departments, such as the Departments of Defense, Justice, Health and Human Services, and Homeland Security.

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Overview

Nigeria is Africa's most populous country, largest economy, and leading oil producer. It plays a major political and economic role in Africa and wields significant influence in regional bodies such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The country's commercial center, Lagos, is among the world's largest cities, with an annual economic output surpassing that of many African countries. By 2050, Nigeria is poised to overtake the United States as the world's third most populous country, with a population projected to exceed 400 million.[1] (At 216 million inhabitants as of mid-2020, Nigeria is currently the world's sixth most populous.) Few countries in Africa have the potential to make a larger global impact.

At the same time, Nigeria faces considerable economic, security, and social challenges. In 2020, the twin shocks of a collapse in the global price of oil, Nigeria's top export, and Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) are expected to push its economy into a deep recession, the country's second contraction in five years. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projected in June 2020 that Nigeria's gross domestic product (GDP) would decline by 5.4% in 2020, with implications for livelihoods, social programs, and state finances—and for a governance system that relies, to a large extent, on the distribution of centrally collected oil revenues.[2] The downturn is likely to heighten development challenges in a country where roughly half the population lives in extreme poverty. It also may draw attention and resources away from a number of pressing security threats, notably including a decade-long insurgency by Islamist extremists in the northeast.

Recent congressional attention on Nigeria has centered on terrorist threats, elections and other governance issues, human rights challenges, and humanitarian conditions. Nigeria routinely ranks among the top global recipients of U.S. development aid, although U.S. concern over Nigerian security force abuses periodically have strained bilateral ties and limited security cooperation. State Department- and USAID-administered assistance totaled over $450 million in FY2020 allocations, excluding emergency humanitarian aid and other globally administered funds.[3] A particular emphasis of U.S. health aid has been efforts to prevent and treat HIV/AIDS; Nigeria is home to the world's second-largest population living with HIV/AIDS.[4] Other U.S. federal departments and agencies also administer assistance to Nigeria.

COVID-19 in Nigeria: Health Impacts and Nigerian and U.S. Responses

As of September 17, Nigeria had confirmed approximately 57,000 cases of COVID-19 (about 26.5 per 100,000 people), with roughly 1,100 deaths (1.9%).[5] After the country recorded its first known case in late February 2020, the Buhari administration imposed a lockdown in three zones—the Federal Capital Territory encompassing the capital, Abuja, as well as Lagos and Ogun States—prohibiting public gatherings and closing schools, places of worship, and most businesses. Authorities in other states introduced full or partial lockdowns, and in mid-March, the central government imposed a nationwide curfew and restrictions on non-essential travel into the country and between states. Since early May, national and state authorities have gradually eased such measures, which imposed a heavy economic burden in an economy already facing a contraction, despite a mounting COVID-19 caseload. (The number of total confirmed cases doubled over a six-week period in mid-2020, from roughly 25,000 in late June to over 50,000 in mid-August).

[1] United Nations Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects 2019 Revision*, 2019.

[2] IMF, *World Economic Outlook* database, June 2020 update.

[3] State Department, 653(a) report for FY2020.

[4] Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS), *UNAIDS Data 2019*, 2019.

[5] CRS calculation of incidence and death rates based on data from Johns Hopkins University COVID-19 map, at https://coronavirus.jhu.edu/map.html, accessed September 10, 2020, and population data from CIA World Factbook.

Nigeria has lagged behind some other African countries in testing for the virus. As of September 17, Nigerian authorities had tested roughly 480,000 samples, as compared to nearly 4.0 million tests conducted in fellow economic powerhouse South Africa, which has a population one-quarter the size of Nigeria's.[6] Low testing rates have raised fears that Nigeria's official caseload may considerably understate the extent of the pandemic. Notably, in April, the northern city of Kano experienced a spike in deaths due to unknown causes; a government inquiry based on interviews with those in contact with the deceased estimated that some 60% of those deaths may have been due to COVID-19. Other cities also reportedly have seen spikes in unexplained deaths due to respiratory illness.[7] Meanwhile, the enforcement of lockdown orders in Nigeria has raised concerns in light of reported abuses by security forces. According to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), an independent government agency, security forces killed nearly 30 people and unlawfully detained, extorted, or tortured dozens more over the first five weeks of lockdown.[8] Several journalists also have faced arrest while reporting on COVID-19.[9]

Nigerian authorities have requested roughly $7 billion from the IMF, World Bank, and other multilateral lenders to help counter the virus and cushion its economic impacts. As of August 2020, the IMF had provided $3.4 billion in emergency financing for Nigeria (see "The Economy," below). As of August 21, the State Department had announced roughly $42 million in U.S. health and humanitarian assistance for Nigeria, separate from U.S. support provided through multilateral institutions.[10] In August, the Administration also donated 200 ventilators to Nigeria, fulfilling a pledge made by President Trump after an April 2020 call with President Buhari.[11]

Politics

Nigeria is a federal republic with 36 states. Its political structure is similar to that of the United States, with a bicameral legislature comprising a 109-member Senate and a 360-member House of Representatives. It became a multiparty democracy in 1999, after four decades of military rule punctuated by repeated coups and intermittent attempts to establish civilian government.

Nigeria's politics have been shaped by efforts to distribute power and state resources equitably in a country that is home to over 250 ethnic groups and has witnessed recurrent conflict along ethno-regional and religious lines. The "federal character" principle, enshrined in the 1999 constitution, requires that appointments to government posts reflect the country's diversity.[12] By a de facto system known as "zoning," political parties rotate candidates for elected office on an ethno-regional basis. Perceived violations of these arrangements have led to conflict: in 2011, for instance, frustrated expectations that a northerner would retain the presidency contributed to post-

[6] Nigeria Centre for Disease Control, COVID-19 Nigeria dashboard; South Africa National Department of Health, COVID-19 dashboard, both accessed September 18, 2020.

[7] Ruth Maclean, "Covid-19 Outbreak in Nigeria Is Just One of Africa's Alarming Hot Spots," *New York Times*, May 17, 2020.

[8] NHRC, *National Human Rights Commission Press Release on COVID-19 Enforcement So Far Report on Incidents of Violation of Human Rights*, April 15, 2020; NHRC, *Report of Alleged Human Rights Violations Recorded Between 13th April to 4th May, 2020 Following the Extension of the Lockdown Period by Government*, May 15, 2020.

[9] See, e.g., Committee to Project Journalists (CPJ), "Nigerian journalist held under cybercrime act for COVID-19 coverage," June 10, 2020.

[10] State Department, "Update: The United States Continues to Lead the Global Response to COVID-19," August 21, 2020.

[11] White House, "Remarks by President Trump in Meeting with Governor DeSantis of Florida," April 28, 2020.

[12] Implementation of the "federal character" remains uneven. See Leila Demarest, Arnim Langer, and Ukoha Ukiwo, "Nigeria's Federal Character Commission (FFC): a critical appraisal," *Oxford Development Studies* (2020).

election riots in which hundreds died.[13] Elections often serve as flashpoints for violence as political office at all tiers of government yields access to oil earnings and other state resources.[14]

Figure 1. Nigeria at a Glance

Size: More than twice the size of California

Capital: Abuja

Population: 214 million; 2.5% growth rate

Languages: English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Igbo), Fulani, over 500 other local languages

Religions: Muslim 54%, Roman Catholic 11%, other Christian 35%, other 1% (2018)

Literacy: 62% (71% male, 53% female) (2015)

Infant Mortality Rate: 60 deaths/1,000 live births

Median Age / Life Expectancy: 18.6 years / 60 years

Prevalence of HIV: 1.5% (2018)

GDP Per Capita / Growth Rate: $1,168 / 2.2% (2019)

Key exports: petroleum and petroleum products 95%, cocoa, rubber (2012)

Source: CRS map with data from the State Department and Esri Data & Maps, both 2019. Fact information from CIA World Factbook and the International Monetary Fund (IMF); 2020 data unless otherwise indicated. GDP per capita is adjusted to international dollars based on purchasing power parity.

The Buhari Administration (2015-Present)

President Muhammadu Buhari, a retired army major general, first won office in 2015 and was reelected in 2019. He had previously served as military head of state after leading a coup d'état in 1983, before being overthrown in another coup in 1985. An ethnic Fulani Muslim from the

[13] The 2011 zoning controversy resulted from the 2010 death of incumbent President Umaru Yar'Adua, a northerner. He was succeeded by southern-born Vice President Goodluck Jonathan, who won reelection in 2011. Many northerners, including some prominent figures within Jonathan's party, opposed Jonathan's candidacy on the grounds that a northerner should have held the presidency for two consecutive terms. For an account of this controversy and the post-election violence, see Human Rights Watch (HRW), *Nigeria: Post-Election Violence Killed 800*, May 16, 2011.

[14] For a study of corruption and oversight challenges related to government expenditures in Nigeria, see Matthew Page, *Camouflaged Cash: How 'Security Votes' Fuel Corruption in Nigeria*, Transparency International, May 2018.

northwest, Buhari swept the north in both electoral cycles. His vice president, Yemi Osinbajo, is an ethnic Yoruba Pentecostal pastor and former state attorney general from the southwest.

Approaching the 2015 polls, Buhari leveraged his military background and stoic reputation to campaign on a platform of addressing mounting security challenges and rooting out graft. Upon taking office, he earned praise for launching an anti-corruption campaign that resulted in charges against several high-ranking former officials, and for intensifying the counterinsurgency against Boko Haram, which had rapidly expanded its territorial control in 2014-2015.[15] In contrast to his predecessor, Buhari strengthened counterterrorism coordination with neighboring countries and recorded a series of military victories against Boko Haram soon after taking office.

Boko Haram has nevertheless proven resilient, as the military has struggled to curb the group's attacks and reestablish state control in contested areas, notably in rural zones. The emergence and growth of an Islamic State-affiliated splinter faction since 2016, alongside rising insecurity in other parts of the country, have placed further strain on Nigeria's overstretched security forces (see "Security Conditions and Human Rights Concerns"). Meanwhile, several high profile corruption cases have stalled in Nigeria's slow-moving court system, and the country's top anti-corruption official has himself come under investigation for alleged graft.[16] Critics accuse the Buhari administration of targeting anti-corruption inquiries to sideline political opponents, even as Buhari's cabinet includes several ministers previously implicated in corrupt practices.[17]

Observers also have expressed concerns over human rights and democracy trends. According to Amnesty International, attacks on the press have "continued unabated" since 2015, as authorities have raided media offices and detained journalists on security and criminal defamation charges.[18] Several Members of Congress have expressed alarm over the prosecution of U.S.-based journalist and 2019 presidential candidate Omoyele Sowore, who faces treason charges for calling for anti-Buhari protests after the election.[19] Despite Buhari's pledge to curb security force misconduct, human rights groups have accused the police and military of torture, extrajudicial killings, and other abuses (see "Security Sector Challenges and Accountability Concerns"). The 2019 elections featured extensive violence and fraud, raising further questions about Nigeria's democratic trajectory as the country enters its third decade of continuous civilian rule (see **Text Box**).

The 2019 Elections and U.S. Engagement

Many observers described the 2019 general elections as a step backward in Nigeria's democratic trajectory and a missed opportunity to build on the successes of the 2015 polls—widely considered the most credible in the country's history.[20] The presidential contest pitted President Buhari against Atiku Abubakar, a former vice

[15] Zainab Usman, "Buhari's first 100 days: Does Nigerian president mean business?" *CNN*, September 4, 2015.

[16] According to the State Department, Nigeria's anticorruption agencies attribute the delays to "a lack of judges and the widespread practice of filing for and granting multiple adjournments." State Department, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria*, 2019.

[17] Ibid. For more on Nigeria's leading anti-corruption agency, see Onyema et. al, *The Economic and Financial Crimes Commission and the politics of (in)effective implementation of Nigeria's anti-corruption policy*, SOAS University of London: Anti-Corruption Evidence (ACE) Research Consortium Working Paper 007.

[18] Amnesty International (AI), *Endangered Voices: Attack on Freedom of Expression in Nigeria*, October 2019.

[19] In December 2019, Senators Booker, Coons, Menendez, and Schumer and Representatives Gottheimer and Pascrell sent a joint letter to Nigeria's Attorney General urging respect for Sowore's due process rights.

[20] See, for instance, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI), *Nigeria International Election Observation Mission Final Report*, June 2019.

president who defected from the ruling party in 2017. Buhari ultimately won with 56% of the vote. Voter turnout for the presidential election was 36%, the lowest rate recorded since Nigeria's democratic transition in 1999.[21]

The 2019 elections featured significant shortcomings. Disinformation, inflammatory rhetoric, and widespread violence marred the pre-election period.[22] Weeks before the election, Buhari replaced Nigeria's chief justice without support from the Senate, prompting the U.S. embassy to express concern that the decision could harm the credibility of the polls, given the judiciary's role in resolving electoral disputes.[23] A weeklong voting delay announced hours before first-round polls were to open created confusion among voters and may have dampened eventual turnout. Election day concerns included "increasingly brazen" vote buying, ballot secrecy violations, and irregularities in ballot collation, according to U.S.-funded international election observers.[24] According to the State Department, state security forces intimidated voters and officials at some polling centers, dimming turnout and reinforcing perceptions (particularly in the south) that "the army is a tool of the ruling party."[25]

Nigeria's elections have been a focus of congressional interest and U.S. foreign assistance. The House Foreign Affairs Committee held a hearing ahead of the 2019 elections, and concurrent resolutions calling for credible elections were introduced in the House and Senate.[26] Secretary of State Michael Pompeo spoke with Buhari and Atiku to underscore the importance of a credible election process. U.S. assistance included technical support for Nigeria's electoral commission, capacity-building programs to enhance civil society oversight of electoral processes, and party strengthening activities.[27] After the polls, the State Department imposed visa restrictions on unnamed individuals "believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy in Nigeria."[28]

Security Conditions and Human Rights Concerns

Boko Haram and the Islamic State-West Africa

Over the past decade, violence between government forces and Islamist insurgents based in the northeast has killed an estimated 38,000 people in Nigeria and displaced over three million throughout the Lake Chad Basin region comprising parts of Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.[29] Founded in the early 2000s as a Salafist Muslim reform movement, *Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad* (JAS), known as Boko Haram ("Western education is forbidden" in the Hausa language), has evolved and expanded since 2009 to become one of the world's deadliest terrorist groups. It espouses an "exclusivist" interpretation of Islam that rejects as sacrilegious the more moderate Islam practiced in much of northern Nigeria, and has attracted some supporters by

[21] Ibid.

[22] According to SB Morgen Intelligence, a Nigeria-based research group, over 600 people were killed during the 2019 election cycle. SBM Intel, *Nigeria: 2019 Election Survey Report*, 2019.

[23] U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, "Statement on the Suspension and Replacement of the Chief Justice," January 26, 2019.

[24] NDI/IRI, *Nigeria International Election Observation Mission Final Report*, op. cit.

[25] State Department, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria*, March 2020.

[26] The concurrent resolutions (S.Con.Res. 1/H.Con.Res. 4) were agreed to in the Senate but not in the House.

[27] USAID, "Nigeria: Elections," accessed May 19, 2020, available at https://www.usaid.gov/elections-0.

[28] State Department, "Imposing Visa Restrictions on Nigerians Responsible for Undermining the Democratic Process," July 23, 2019.

[29] Fatality figure from Council on Foreign Relations, "Nigeria Security Tracker," at https://www.cfr.org/nigeria/nigeria-security-tracker/p29483, accessed September 9, 2020. Displacement figure from International Organization for Migration (IOM) and U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). See UNHCR, "Operational Portal: Nigeria Situation," at https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/nigeriasituation, accessed September 9, 2020.

stoking a sense of state persecution and victimhood.[30] Security force abuses appear to have fueled recruitment by playing into such narratives, while economic motivations also may play a role.[31]

In 2015, Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau pledged loyalty to the Islamic State (IS, aka the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, ISIL/ISIS), and Boko Haram subsequently rebranded as the Islamic State's West Africa Province (IS-WA, aka ISWAP or ISIS-WA). An ensuing leadership dispute fractured the group; the Islamic State ultimately recognized a different leader of IS-WA, while Shekau's faction reassumed the group's original name. (Observers generally refer to Shekau's faction as Boko Haram.) In contrast to Shekau's Boko Haram, which gained notoriety for its indiscriminate assaults on civilian centers and use of female and child suicide bombers, IS-WA has focused attacks primarily on security forces and other state targets. IS-WA also reportedly has sought to provide basic services and law enforcement in its areas of operation, building ties with local communities that could further complicate counterinsurgency efforts.[32] As of late 2019, the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) estimated IS-WA to have roughly 3,500 members, and Boko Haram to have 1,500.[33] In August 2020, the U.N. Secretary-General's report on global Islamic State operations noted that IS-WA "remains a major focus of ISIL global propaganda" and described it as "one of the largest and most conspicuous of [ISIL's] remote 'provinces.'"[34]

Boko Haram and IS-WA are based in northeast Nigeria, though each remains capable of mounting cross-border attacks in the wider Lake Chad Basin region. Regional counterinsurgency efforts are coordinated under the African Union-authorized Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), which comprises troops from Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The MNJTF has received U.S. and other donor support. MNJTF forces have mounted some successful operations, notably in border zones and areas around Lake Chad, yet they continue to face capacity gaps and coordination challenges, and security gains often have been short-lived.[35]

Boko Haram and IS-WA pose a threat to international targets and Western citizens in the region, though no U.S. citizens are publicly reported to have been killed or kidnapped by either group. The State Department has designated Boko Haram, IS-WA, and a separate splinter faction known as Ansaru as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act (as amended) and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists (SDGTs) subject to

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[30] Alex Thurston, *"The Disease is Unbelief': Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview,"* Brookings Institution, January 2016. For more on Boko Haram, see Jacob Zenn et. al, *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 9, 2018; Alex Thurston, *Boko Haram: The History of an African Jihadist Movement* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2017); and Brandon Kendhammer and Carmen McCain, *Boko Haram* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2018).

[31] On economic drivers of extremist recruitment, see Mercy Corps, *Motivations and Empty Promises: Voices of Former Boko Haram Combatants and Nigerian Youth*, February 2015. On the role of state abuses in driving enlistment into extremist groups in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa, see United Nations Development Program (UNDP), *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment,* 2017.

[32] According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), IS-WA "has cultivated a level of support among local civilians that Boko Haram never enjoyed and has turned neglected communities in the area and islands in Lake Chad into a source of economic support." ICG, *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, May 16, 2019.

[33] Lead Inspector General Report to the United States Congress, *East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations: October 1, 2019-December 31, 2019*, February 2020.

[34] U.N. Security Council, *Eleventh report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat,* U.N. doc. S/2020/774, August 4, 2020.

[35] ICG, *What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram?*, July 26, 2020; Omar S Mahmood and Ndubuisi Christian Ani, *Responses to Boko Haram in the Lake Chad Region: Policies, Cooperation and Livelihoods*, Institute for Security Studies, July 2018.

U.S. financial sanctions under Executive Order 13224. The State Department also has designated several individuals linked to Boko Haram and IS-WA as SGDTs.

As Nigeria's Islamist insurgencies have persisted, non-state vigilante groups have emerged to provide security in some zones. Known collectively as the Civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF), they have, in some cases, received state support or participated in military operations; some also have received U.N. training.[36] The CJTF reportedly has helped stabilize some areas, including by channeling information between community members and the military.[37] At the same time, some CJTF members reportedly have committed violence against civilians and other abuses.[38]

The Chibok and Dapchi Kidnappings and U.S. Responses

Boko Haram and IS-WA have abducted thousands of civilians, including several thousand children.[39] Two mass kidnappings—Boko Haram's abduction of 276 girls from Chibok (Borno State) in 2014, and IS-WA's abduction of 110 girls from Dapchi (Yobe State) in 2018—have drawn significant U.S. attention. Muslim communities in northeast Nigeria have borne the brunt of kidnappings and other attacks by the two groups, yet the Chibok and Dapchi abductions were notable, in part, for their targeting of Christians: many Chibok victims reportedly were Christian, and of the students abducted from Dapchi, all but one, a Christian named Leah Sharibu, have been killed or released. IS-WA reportedly has refused to free Sharibu as punishment for her refusal to convert to Islam.[40]

In response to the 2014 Chibok abduction, which gave rise to the international "#BringBackOurGirls" advocacy movement, the Obama Administration sent an interagency team to Nigeria to support search efforts. President Obama also deployed an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and approximately 80 U.S. military personnel to neighboring Chad to support recovery operations through surveillance activities.[41] Though over half of the Chibok students have escaped over the years, more than 100 remain missing. (The U.S. UAV mission reportedly ended in late 2014; in early 2015, a Pentagon spokesperson stated that the number of surveillance missions requested by Nigerian authorities "had dropped to the point that we were able to cover it through other means."[42])

U.S. policymakers have shown an enduring interest in the victims of the Chibok and Dapchi kidnappings. Several Members of Congress have met with or hosted Chibok survivors; in 2016, one testified before the House of Representatives.[43] President Trump hosted two Chibok survivors at the White House in 2017. Some Members have considered Leah Sharibu's ongoing captivity in the context of broader concerns over religious freedom in Nigeria (see below). In the 116th Congress, S.Res. 170 and H.Res. 375 would recognize the fifth anniversary of the Chibok abduction and call for the release of the remaining Chibok girls and of Sharibu.

[36] U.N. Development Program (UNDP), "UNDP trains vigilantes and Civilian Joint Task Force members in human rights and leadership," July 9, 2019.

[37] Center for Civilians in Conflict, *Civilian Perceptions of the Yan Gora (CJTF) in Borno State, Nigeria*¸ 2018.

[38] Idayat Hassan and Zacharias Piero, "The Rise and Risks of Nigeria's Civilian Joint Task Force: Implications for Post-Conflict Recovery in Northeast Nigeria," *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, May 9, 2018.

[39] ICG, *Preventing Boko Haram Abductions of Schoolchildren in Nigeria*, April 12, 2018; Drew Hinshaw and Joe Parkinson, "The 10,000 Kidnapped Boys of Boko Haram," *Wall Street Journal*, August 12, 2016.

[40] Bukola Adebayo, "Lone Dapchi schoolgirl in Boko Haram captivity begs for her freedom," *CNN*, August 28, 2018.

[41] White House, Letter from the President to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President Pro Tempore of the Senate, June 12, 2014.

[42] Armin Rosen, "Almost a year after #BringBackOurGirls, they're still missing but the US pulled its 80 troops looking for Boko Haram," Business Insider, March 11, 2015.

[43] House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, *The U.S. Role in Helping Nigeria Confront Boko Haram and Other Threats in Northern Nigeria*, 114th Cong., May 11, 2016.

Intercommunal Violence and Nigeria's "Farmer-Herder" Conflicts

In the Middle Belt—a loosely defined region spanning Nigeria's North Central geopolitical zone and adjacent parts of the North East and North West (see map)—violence between sedentary farmers and mobile livestock herders has surged in recent years. Precise statistics are unavailable and fatality counts are contested, but one expert analysis estimated that farmer-herder conflicts in the Middle Belt killed 2,000 Nigerians annually between 2011 and 2016.[44] In the northwest, such clashes have mounted in a context of escalating insecurity marked by armed banditry, kidnapping for ransom, ethnic vigilantism, and intercommunal conflict that killed approximately 8,000 people and displaced 200,000 between 2011 and early 2020.[45] More recently, Islamist extremist groups reportedly have sought to establish themselves in the northwest, building ties with local communities, criminal gangs, and herder-affiliated militia.[46] In August 2020, the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command-Africa stated that "we're seeing al-Qaida starting to make some inroads" in the northwest, but provided no further information about the assertion.[47]

Figure 2. Nigeria's Geopolitical Zones

Source: CRS map with data from the State Department and Esri Data & Maps, both 2019.

Conflict between farmers and herders over access to resources, crop damage, and livestock theft is not a new phenomenon, but mounting demographic, ecological, and socioeconomic pressures have placed growing strains on intercommunal relations. A 2018 *Reuters* analysis found that a decades-long expansion of farming activity in the Middle Belt had sharply reduced the amount of

[44] ICG, *Stopping Nigeria's Spiralling Farmer-Herder Violence*, July 26, 2018.

[45] ICG, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, May 18, 2020.

[46] Ibid.

[47] State Department, "Digital Briefing on U.S. Efforts to Combat Terrorism in Africa during COVID," August 4, 2020.

land available for livestock grazing.[48] Rising livestock prices have spurred organized cattle rustling and other forms of criminality, prompting herders to heavily arm themselves for self-defense and herd protection.[49] Weapons used by all parties have grown more sophisticated, with arms sourced from national defense stockpiles or trafficked into the country from abroad.[50]

Farmer-herder tensions in Nigeria often overlap with ethnic and religious cleavages, heightening the risk of escalation and complicating attempts at conflict resolution. In the Middle Belt, much of the violence has pitted largely Christian farmers of various ethnicities against predominately Muslim, ethnic Fulani herders. (The Fulani are an expansive, diverse group that spans much of Central and West Africa.) The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF, a congressionally mandated independent body) finds that herder-farmer clashes in Nigeria "can sometimes be framed as being between religious groups or can lead to reprisals that target individuals based on their religion."[51] (In the northwest, however, much of the violence has pitted Fulani herders against ethnic Hausa farmers, both predominately Muslim.)

Efforts to resolve farmer-herder violence and address resource access challenges have proven ineffective to date. In 2018, the Buhari administration unveiled a ten-year National Livestock Transformation Plan (NLTP) entailing the establishment of ranches for sedentary grazing and other agriculture sector investments. The NLTP, which some critics portray as overly favorable to herder communities, is being piloted in several states, yet its implementation has been slow.[52] Meanwhile, political leaders have inflamed tensions through hate speech and prohibitions on open grazing, which herders view as a threat to their livelihoods.[53]

Religious Freedom Issues, Sharia Law, and the Shia Minority

Islamist extremism in the north and farmer-herder clashes in the Middle Belt have heightened U.S. concerns over religious freedom in Nigeria, whose population is roughly half Christian, half Muslim. In 2019, the Trump Administration placed Nigeria on the "Special Watch List" pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA, P.L. 105-292, as amended), finding that the government had tolerated or engaged in "severe violations of religious freedom."[54] A downgrade to Country of Particular Concern (CPC) status—a designation USCIRF has recommended for Nigeria each year since 2009—could carry restrictions on certain kinds of U.S. foreign assistance.

U.S. religious freedom concerns partly center on the application of Sharia (Islamic) law in Nigeria's north. Sharia courts have operated in northern Nigeria since independence in 1960, yet their jurisdiction was limited to civil law until 1999, when northern states began to extend Sharia to criminal cases. Sharia criminal courts now operate in 12 northern states and the Federal Capital

[48] Ryan McNeill and Alexis Akwagyiram, "The Fight for Nigeria's heartland," *Reuters*, December 19, 2018.

[49] Matt Luizza, "Urban Elites' Livestock Exacerbate Herder-Farmer Tensions in Africa's Sudano-Sahel," *Wilson Center New Security Beat*, June 10, 2019; Chom Bagu and Katie Smith, *Past is Prologue: Criminality & Reprisal Attacks in Nigeria's Middle Belt*, Search for Common Ground (SFCG), 2017.

[50] Conflict Armament Research, *Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Conflict: Domestic, Regional, and Transcontinental Weapon Sources*, January 2020.

[51] USCIRF, *Annual Report 2020*, April 2020.

[52] See, e.g., Adelani Adepegba, "NLTP is RUGA in disguise –SMBLF," *The Punch*, September 27, 2019.

[53] Chris M.A. Kwaja and Bukola I. Ademola-Adelehin, *The Implications of the Open Grazing Prohibition and Ranches Establishment Law on Farmer-Herder Relations in the Middle Belt of Nigeria*, SFCG, December 2017; USCIRF, *Central Nigeria: Overcoming Dangerous Speech and Ending Religious Divides*, February 2019.

[54] For more on country designations pursuant to the IFRA, see CRS In Focus IF10803, *Global Human Rights: International Religious Freedom Policy*, by Michael A. Weber.

Territory encompassing the capital. (The courts may not compel participation by non-Muslims, though non-Muslims may elect to have cases tried in Sharia courts.[55]) The advent of Sharia criminal law in Nigeria sparked alarm due in part to the potentially harsh sentences prescribed under Sharia, which include amputation and death by stoning. Such concerns waned as Sharia judges generally refrained from imposing these more severe sentences, but in 2020, a Kano State Sharia court sentenced a Muslim singer to death for blasphemy, sparking outrage from human rights groups.[56] Also in 2020, Kaduna State authorities arrested a prominent atheist, reportedly for blasphemy, and transferred him to Kano for prosecution, spurring further alarm over religious freedom trends and raising questions about statutory protections for non-Muslims under Sharia.[57]

State repression of minority Shia Muslims in northern Nigeria, which is predominately Sunni, has garnered growing attention in recent years. In 2015, the military killed nearly 350 members of the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), a Shia movement led by Iranian-trained cleric Ibrahim Zakzaky, and arrested Zakzaky and hundreds of his adherents.[58] A state inquiry found the army culpable for the massacre, but no soldiers have faced prosecution. Zakzaky remains in detention on charges of unlawful assembly and homicide in connection with the death of a soldier during the incident. Security forces have since violently suppressed a series of protests calling for his release, killing dozens of IMN members with the use of live fire and arresting hundreds more.[59]

Niger Delta Insecurity: Militancy, Criminality, and Oil Theft

Political unrest, criminality, and intermittent bouts of armed militancy linked to grievances over perceived exploitation and environmental degradation have afflicted the southern, oil-rich Niger Delta region for decades.[60] Despite massive petroleum reserves, the Niger Delta faces high rates of poverty and unemployment. Decades of oil spills, which oil companies attribute to vandalism and oil theft, but which human rights groups ascribe to negligent practices on the part of oil operators, have devastated local livelihoods and contributed to stark ecological and health challenges.[61] A 2011 assessment by the U.N. Environment Program (UNEP) called for the rehabilitation of vast swathes of the Niger Delta, but such efforts have stalled as state agencies mandated to coordinate the clean-up have faced allegations of corruption and mismanagement. Human rights advocates claim the vast majority of UNEP-identified zones remain polluted.[62]

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[55] Some non-Muslims report a preference for Sharia courts, considering them more to be more efficient and less corrupt than common law courts. USCIRF, *Shari'ah Criminal Law in Northern Nigeria: Implementation of Expanded Shari'ah Penal and Criminal Procedure Codes in Kano, Sokoto, and Zamfara States, 2017-2019*, December 2019.

[56] AI, "Nigeria: Authorities must quash the conviction and death sentence imposed on Kano-based singer," August 13, 2020.

[57] USCIRF, "USCIRF Condemns Death Sentence for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu on Blasphemy Charges," August 11, 2020 and "USCIRF Condemns Arrest of Prominent Nigerian Atheist, Mubarak Bala," May 8, 2020.

[58] USCIRF, *Annual Report 2017*, April 2017.

[59] Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria: End Impunity for Killings of Shia," December 12, 2018; Dionne Searcey and Emmanuel Akinwotu, "Nigeria Says Soldiers Who Killed Marchers Were Provoked. Video Shows Otherwise," *The New York Times*, December 17, 2018.

[60] In the early 1990s, activists from the Ogoni ethnic group drew international attention to the extensive environmental damage done by oil extraction in the Niger Delta. Activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, president of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), and 14 others were accused in 1994 of involvement in the murder of several Ogoni politicians. They pled not guilty, but Saro-Wiwa and eight others were convicted and executed. The executions sparked outrage against the regime of military ruler Sani Abacha, and the United States recalled its ambassador in response.

[61] Anna Bruederle and Roland Hodler, "Effect of oil spills on infant mortality in Nigeria," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, vol. 116, no. 12 (March 2019), pp. 5467-5471.

[62] AI, *No Clean-Up, No Justice: An Evaluation of the Implementation of UNEP's Environmental Assessment of*

In 2009, in response to a wave of attacks on oil infrastructure that sharply reduced output, the government launched an amnesty and monthly stipend for militants. The program has curbed large attacks on oil facilities, but root causes of insecurity remain unaddressed and ex-militants routinely threaten to resume violence. In 2016, renewed attacks on oil infrastructure pushed production to a 30-year low, helping trigger an economic recession. Oil theft for black-market sale is another key challenge, one implicating criminal networks, politicians, security personnel, and oil workers.[63] The Niger Delta also is the epicenter of maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea: for several years, waters off Nigeria have ranked among the world's most dangerous for attacks at sea.[64] The region has become a hotspot for kidnappings targeting shipping personnel, as attackers exploit vast river networks to hide abducted crew while negotiating ransoms.

Security Sector Challenges and Accountability Concerns

Several factors have undermined the government's response to security challenges. A 2018 analysis by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace found that "decades of unchecked corruption have hollowed out the Nigerian military and security services and rendered them unable to effectively combat Boko Haram or address ethno-religious and communal conflict."[65] Equipment shortages reportedly have hindered counterterrorism operations, as IS-WA and Boko Haram have looted weaponry and other materiel in repeated raids on military facilities.[66] Reports suggest that personnel have deployed for extended periods without rotation, with implications for troop morale and discipline.[67] The *Wall Street Journal* and others have accused the military of concealing evidence of mounting losses by burying soldiers without notifying their families.[68]

The State Department's 2019 human rights report documented accounts of extrajudicial and arbitrary killings by security forces, enforced disappearances, violence against journalists and protesters, and arbitrary detention and torture of detainees.[69] Attention has centered on abuses committed during counterterrorism operations, in which Nigerian security forces allegedly have executed hundreds of civilians, arbitrarily detained thousands more, and committed widespread torture.[70] Those captured in military sweeps or arrested after fleeing extremist-held territory may be detained without charge for extended periods while undergoing interrogation: Amnesty International estimates that "likely more than 10,000" people, including many children, have died in custody due to overcrowding, heat, inadequate health and sanitation facilities, and insufficient food and water.[71] Security personnel reportedly have raped and sexually exploited women and girls, including detainees and displaced people.[72] Impunity for such abuses remains widespread.

Ogoniland, Nine Years On, June 2020.

[63] Transparency International, *Military Involvement in Oil Theft in the Niger Delta: A Discussion Paper*, June 2019.

[64] CRS In Focus IF11117, *Gulf of Guinea: Recent Trends in Piracy and Armed Robbery*, by Tomas F. Husted.

[65] Matthew Page, *A New Taxonomy for Corruption in Nigeria*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, July 2018.

[66] Neil Munshi, "Under fire: why Nigeria is struggling to defeat Boko Haram," *Financial Times*, December 6, 2018.

[67] See, e.g., Obi Anyadike, "'Year of the Debacle': How Nigeria Lost Its Way in the War Against Boko Haram," *World Politics Review*, October 30, 2018.

[68] Joe Parkinson, "Nigeria Buries Soldiers at Night in Secret Cemetery," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 31, 2019.

[69] State Department, *2019 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria*, op. cit.

[70] AI, *Stars on Their Shoulders. Blood on their Hands. War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military*, 2015.

[71] AI, *"We Dried Our Tears": Addressing the Toll on Children of Northeast Nigeria's Conflict*, May 2020.

[72] Human Rights Watch, *They Didn't Know if I was Alive or Dead*, September 10, 2019; and AI, *"They betrayed us": Women who survived Boko Haram raped, starved and detained in Nigeria*, May 24, 2018.

Security force abuses have hindered U.S. counterterrorism cooperation with the Nigerian military (see "U.S. Relations and Assistance"), and may help drive extremist recruitment and discourage demobilization.[73] According to Amnesty International, the detention and abuse of individuals who defect or escape from Boko Haram have led former detainees to report that they would not encourage others to flee from Boko Haram, lest they undergo a similar experience.[74]

The Economy

Nigeria's economy is the largest in Africa.[75] The petroleum sector accounts for roughly half of state revenues and a large share of foreign exchange earnings, though services, agriculture, and manufacturing together employ a much larger segment of the labor force and contribute most of GDP.[76] Lagos, Nigeria's commercial center, is among the world's largest cities and has emerged as a leading technology hub in Africa. With a youthful, rapidly growing population and abundant natural resource reserves, Nigeria has the potential to become a global economic powerhouse.

According to various analyses, Nigeria's economy continues to underperform. Infrastructure gaps, policy uncertainty, chronic power shortages, and years of underinvestment in education have impeded productivity.[77] Pervasive corruption drains state resources and discourages private investment.[78] Longstanding government intervention measures such as fuel subsidies, foreign exchange controls, import restrictions, and tax exemptions have created market distortions, eroded state finances, and enabled graft.[79] Due to poor non-oil tax administration and high non-compliance, Nigeria has one of the world's lowest ratios of tax revenues to GDP.[80]

Already in a period of low growth in the wake of a brief 2016 recession, Nigeria's economy is expected to face its sharpest contraction in decades amid a collapse in global oil prices and economic disruptions brought on by COVID-19. As of June 2020, the IMF projected Nigeria's GDP to contract by 5.4% in 2020; according to Nigeria's statistical agency, the economy shrank by an annualized rate of 6.1% between April and June.[81] Nigeria's poorest households are likely to endure the brunt of COVID-19's economic shocks. According to the World Bank, the downturn could push five million more Nigerians into poverty as compared to pre-pandemic projections.[82] Roughly half of Nigerians work in the informal labor force with sparse social safety nets, leaving them especially vulnerable. Remittance inflows from Nigerian workers abroad,

[73] UNDP, *Journey to Extremism in Africa: Drivers, Incentives and the Tipping Point for Recruitment,* December 2017.

[74] AI, *"We Dried Our Tears": Addressing the Toll on Children...* op. cit.

[75] Economy size ranking as of 2019. World Bank DataBank, "GDP (current US$)," accessed September 10, 2020.

[76] Sarah Burns and Olly Owen, *Nigeria: No Longer an Oil State?*, Oxford Martin School Working Paper, August 2019.

[77] World Bank, *Jumpstarting Inclusive Growth: Unlocking the Productive Potential of Nigeria's People and Resource Endowments*, Fall 2019.

[78] State Department, *2020 Investment Climate Statements; Nigeria,* September 2020.

[79] Matthew Page, *A New Taxonomy for Corruption in Nigeria,* Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, op. cit.

[80] IMF, *Nigeria: Staff Report for the 2019 Article IV Consultation—Press Release; Staff Report; and Statement by the Executive Director for Nigeria,* April 2019; Brahima S. Coulibaly and Dhruv Gandhi, "Mobilization of tax revenues in Africa: State of play and policy options," Brookings, October 2018.

[81] IMF, "Nigeria," accessed August 14, 2020, available at https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/NGA; Oladeinde Olawoyin, "Nigeria's economy sees biggest decline in 10 years," *Premium Times,* August 24, 2020.

[82] World Bank, *Nigeria in Times of COVID-19: Laying Foundations for a Strong Recovery*, June 2020.

valued at over 5% of GDP in 2019, have fallen sharply; half of Nigerians live in remittance-receiving households.[83]

Plunging oil receipts are likely to have severe consequences for state finances. Allocations to federal, state, and local governments from the Federation Account—a centrally administered fund of oil earnings and other state revenues—dipped in mid-2020 and may decline further as Nigeria seeks to come into compliance with production cuts mandated by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). The government has announced a stimulus package to cushion the impacts of the downturn, and in April 2020, the IMF approved an emergency loan of $3.4 billion through its Rapid Financing Instrument.[84] Approval of requested support from the World Bank reportedly has faced delays over demands for economic policy reforms on the part of the Nigerian government.[85] The Buhari administration has adjusted its official exchange rate downward, a key request on the part of international lenders, and has eliminated a longstanding fuel subsidy and raised electricity tariffs. The government's future commitment to such cost-cutting measures, which are highly unpopular among consumers, remains to be seen; Buhari's predecessor also sought to remove gasoline subsidies, but reversed the decision after nationwide protests.

Development Challenges and Humanitarian Conditions

According to the World Data Lab, a nongovernmental data analysis organization, roughly 102 million Nigerians live in extreme poverty—the largest extremely poor population in the world.[86] The World Bank estimated in early 2020 that roughly half of Nigerians were living on less than $1.90 per day.[87] Needs are most acute in the conflict-affected northeast: according to U.N. agencies, nearly 2.1 million Nigerians were displaced internally as of June 2020, largely due to the Boko Haram/IS-WA conflict, with an additional 300,000 living as refugees in Chad, Cameroon, and Niger.[88] In early 2020, the U.N. estimated that nearly ten million people in the Lake Chad Basin region required aid, including eight million Nigerians.[89] Much of the northeast faces crisis- or emergency-level food insecurity, with a risk of famine in some areas.[90]

Nigeria has made notable progress in combating fatal diseases in recent years, significantly reducing HIV/AIDS prevalence and declaring itself polio-free in 2020 following a prolonged immunization campaign. Still, as of 2015 (latest data), 30% of Nigerians lacked access to improved water, while 70% lacked access to basic sanitation facilities.[91] Roughly 37% of children under five are "stunted," or too short for their age (a risk indicator of impaired development),

[83] Ibid.

[84] IMF, "IMF Executive Board Approves US$ 3.4 Billion in Emergency Support to Nigeria to address the COVID-19 Pandemic," April 28, 2020.

[85] Chijioke Ohuocha and Libby George, "Exclusive: Nigeria's $1.5 billion World Bank loan delayed over reforms, say sources," *Reuters*, August 17, 2020.

[86] See, e.g., World Data Lab, *World Poverty Clock*, at https://worldpoverty.io/map, accessed September 8, 2020.

[87] World Bank, *Macro Poverty Outlook: Spring Meetings 2020*, April 2020.

[88] Data from the IOM and UNHCR. See UNHCR, "Operational Portal: Nigeria Situation," available at https://data2.unhcr.org/en/situations/nigeriasituation, accessed August 27, 2020.

[89] USAID, "Lake Chad Basin – Complex Emergency," Fact Sheet #2 (FY2020), March 31, 2020.

[90] FEWS NET, "Increase in conflict and continued COVID-19," op. cit.

[91] World Bank, *Nigeria Biannual Economic Update: Water supply, sanitation & hygiene—a wake-up call*, April 2019.

with higher proportions in the north.[92] Among Nigerians aged 15-49, some 35% of women and 22% of men have no formal education; literacy is lowest in the northeast and northwest.[93]

Relative to GDP, Nigeria's public spending on health and education ranks among the lowest globally.[94] Nigeria places among the worst performing countries on the World Bank's *Human Capital Index*, a survey of health and education indicators.[95] Endemic corruption diverts resources away from social services, heightening barriers to poverty reduction and development promotion.

U.S.-Nigeria Trade and Investment

As of 2019, Nigeria was the United States' second-largest trading partner in sub-Saharan Africa (after South Africa) and third-largest beneficiary of U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in the region (after Mauritius and South Africa).[96] Nigerian exports to the United States are dominated by crude oil, which at $4.4 billion accounted for 88% of U.S. imports from Nigeria in 2019.[97] According to U.S. International Trade Commission data, Nigeria consistently ranks as the top source of exports to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, P.L. 106-200, as amended) trade preference program; crude oil accounts for nearly all such exports. U.S. imports of Nigerian crude have fallen sharply since 2011 as U.S. domestic energy production has increased.

Nigeria is a major regional destination for U.S. exports of motor vehicles and refined petroleum products (e.g., gasoline), which are among the fastest-growing U.S. exports to Africa. Agricultural products and machinery are other top U.S. exports to the country. Nigerian demand also has driven growing U.S. petroleum exports to nearby Togo, a regional transshipment hub.[98]

U.S. FDI is concentrated in the oil and gas sectors.[99] Investors in Nigeria cite foreign exchange risk and policy uncertainty as key concerns.[100] Import restrictions and local content requirements intended to foster domestic industry may deter U.S. investment, though the State Department reports that "corruption and lack of transparency in tender processes has been a far greater concern to U.S. companies than discriminatory policies based on foreign status."[101] Inadequate power supply, infrastructure gaps, and poor intellectual property protections also may constrain U.S. and other investor interest.[102]

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[92] Nigeria National Population Commission and ICF. 2019. *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey 2018*, 2019.

[93] Ibid.

[94] IMF, *Staff Report for the 2019 Article IV Consultation*, March 13, 2019.

[95] World Bank Human Capital Index, available at https://www.worldbank.org/en/publication/human-capital.

[96] U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of Economic Analysis, "International Trade and Investment Country Factsheets," accessed September 10, 2020.

[97] CRS estimate based on data from the U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) Dataweb, accessed September 10, 2020.

[98] Togo recently has ranked among the top destinations for U.S. petroleum product exports in Africa. Per the USITC, "Nigeria is actually the main source of petroleum product demand in West Africa, but high rates of piracy in Nigerian waters and congestion at Lagos, Nigeria's largest port, have encouraged traders to operate out of Togo instead." USITC, *U.S. Trade and Investment with Sub-Saharan Africa: Recent Trends and New Developments*, March 2020.

[99] State Department, *2020 Investment Climate Statements; Nigeria*, op. cit.

[100] KPMG, *Top 10 Business Risks in 2020/21*, April 2020.

[101] State Department, *2020 Investment Climate Statements; Nigeria*, op. cit.

[102] USITC, *U.S. Trade and Investment with Sub-Saharan Africa*, op. cit.; State Department, *2019 Investment Climate Statements; Nigeria*, op. cit.

U.S. Relations and Assistance

U.S.-Nigeria ties improved after Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, and they remain robust. President Trump's phone call to President Buhari in 2017 was his first to any sub-Saharan African leader; in April 2018, Buhari became the first sub-Saharan African leader to meet with President Trump at the White House. Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Tibor Nagy visited Nigeria during his first official trip to the region, in 2018. He expressed interest in seeing Nigeria play a larger role in peacekeeping and democracy promotion in Africa, and described Nigeria as a focus country for efforts to increase U.S. commercial activity in the region.[103]

Bilateral engagements include the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC), a mechanism for convening high-level officials for strategic dialogue that was launched in 2010. The most recent BNC, held in January 2020 in Washington, D.C., centered on bolstering U.S.-Nigeria commercial ties.[104] A separate U.S.-Nigeria Commercial and Investment Dialogue (CID) aims to enhance bilateral trade and investment, with an initial focus on "infrastructure, agriculture, digital economy, investment, and regulatory reform."[105] The United States maintains an embassy in Abuja and a consulate in Lagos, and the State Department supports "American Corners" in libraries throughout Nigeria to share information on U.S. culture. Nigerians comprise the largest African-born population in the United States, according to U.S. Census data, and remittances from the United States are a source of income support for many Nigerian households.[106]

U.S. human rights and governance concerns periodically have raised challenges for bilateral ties. As noted above (see "Politics"), the State Department imposed visa restrictions on individuals found responsible for undermining the conduct of the 2019 general elections. In September 2020, the State Department imposed additional sanctions on unnamed Nigerians for "undermining the democratic process," citing gubernatorial elections in Kogi and Bayelsa States in late 2019 that featured reports of violence and fraud as well as forthcoming gubernatorial polls in Edo and Ondo States, which have seen rising tensions ahead of elections scheduled for late 2020.[107]

In 2019, as noted above (see "Religious Freedom Issues, Sharia Law, and the Shia Minority"), the State Department placed Nigeria on the Special Watch List pursuant to the IFRA for governments that tolerate or engage in severe violations of religious freedom. In its 2020 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) report, the State Department additionally designated Nigeria pursuant to the Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA, Title IV of P.L. 110-457) as having government or state-supported armed forces that use child soldiers, a designation that could carry restrictions on U.S. aid in FY2021, subject to a presidential waiver and exceptions.[108] The State Department also downgraded Nigeria to the Tier 2 Watch List (from Tier 2) in the 2020 TIP report, meaning the country does not meet minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. A further downgrade to Tier 3 status could carry restrictions on certain types of U.S. assistance.[109]

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[103] Assistant Secretary Nagy, "The Enduring Partnership between the United States and Nigeria," November 9, 2018.

[104] State Department, "U.S. Department of State to Host the 2020 U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission Meeting," January 31, 2020.

[105] State Department, *2019 Investment Climate Statements; Nigeria*, op. cit.

[106] U.S. Census Bureau, American Community Survey, 2018 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

[107] State Department, "Imposing Visa Restrictions on Nigerians Responsible for Undermining the Democratic Process," September 14, 2020.

[108] State Department, *2020 Trafficking in Persons Report*, June 2020.

[109] Ibid.

In January 2020, President Trump issued Proclamation 9983, which added Nigeria to the list of countries whose nationals are subject to restrictions on entry to the United States introduced under Executive Order (EO) 13780 (the "Travel Ban"). Proclamation 9983 stated that Nigeria "does not adequately share public-safety and terrorism-related information" required for U.S. immigration screening.[110] The action suspends the entry of Nigerian immigrants except as Special Immigrants, subject to waivers and exceptions, and does not apply to U.S. citizens or lawful permanent residents. In August 2020, President Buhari stated that his administration had made progress toward addressing U.S. concerns, but that it would require "enormous resources" to fully implement the recommendations of a Nigerian commission established to resolve the matter.[111]

U.S. Justice Sector Engagement: Cybercrime and "Abacha Loot" Repatriation

Nigeria is globally notorious for cybercrimes, including advance-fee "419 scams," named for the article in Nigeria's penal code that outlaws fraudulent e-mails. Recent attention has focused on the role of Nigerian nationals in "romance scams," whereby conspirators defraud victims through fake social media profiles, including by posing as U.S. military personnel. The U.S. government has supported Nigerian authorities in cracking down on such crimes, and joint U.S.-Nigerian law enforcement operations have led to hundreds of arrests in the United States and Nigeria for fraud and cybercrimes.[112] In June 2020, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on six Nigerian nationals for email and romance scams under EO 13694 (as amended), pertaining to malicious cyber activities.[113]

The United States also has supported efforts to repatriate the proceeds of corruption by former dictator Sani Abacha, who embezzled billions of dollars in public funds during his time in office (1993-1998). In 2014, the Department of Justice (DOJ) announced that a federal court in the District of Columbia had ordered forfeited to the United States roughly $500 million in ill-gotten Abacha assets laundered through U.S. banks and held in foreign bank accounts.[114] DOJ has authority to pay restitution to the victims of the corruption out of the forfeited funds.[115] The Bailiwick of Jersey, a British Crown dependency, subsequently enforced the ruling against roughly $310 million held in its jurisdiction; the DOJ transferred those funds to the Nigerian government in May 2020.[116] DOJ efforts to enforce the ruling against funds held in other jurisdictions remain ongoing.

Some Members of Congress have raised concerns over the restitution of corruption proceeds directly to the Nigerian government. Ahead of the May 2020 transfer of assets from Jersey, several lawmakers issued letters to the DOJ expressing concern over the potential misuse of repatriated funds, demanding clarification regarding the oversight of returned assets, and raising alarm over broader governance trends under President Buhari.[117] Past analyses have identified challenges with tracking the use of restituted Abacha funds.[118] Some foreign governments have sought to ensure that recovered funds be used to support development objectives; for instance, Switzerland recently repatriated $321 million in Abacha funds through a cash assistance project managed by the World Bank.

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[110] White House, "Proclamation on Improving Enhanced Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry," January 31, 2020.

[111] State House Abuja, "Nigeria Making Progress to Reverse U.S Visa Restriction- President Buhari," August 13, 2020.

[112] See, e.g., U.S. Attorney's Office, Central District of California, "Massive International Fraud and Money Laundering Conspiracy Detailed in Federal Grand Jury Indictment that Charges 80 Defendants," August 22, 2019; DOJ, "281 Arrested Worldwide in Coordinated International Enforcement Operation Targeting Hundreds of Individuals in Business Email Compromise Schemes," September 10, 2019.

[113] Treasury Department, "Treasury Sanctions Nigerian Cyber Actors for Targeting U.S. Businesses and Individuals," June 16, 2020.

[114] DOJ, "U.S. Forfeits Over $480 Million Stolen by Former Nigerian Dictator in Largest Forfeiture Ever Obtained Through a Kleptocracy Action," August 7, 2014.

[115] 28 C.F.R. pt. 9 (2018).

[116] DOJ, "U.S. Repatriates over $311.7 Million in Assets to the Nigerian People that were Stolen by Former Nigerian Dictator and His Associates," May 4, 2020.

[117] See letter from Senator Charles Grassley to Deborah Connor, Chief of the Money Laundering and Asset Recovery Section at DOJ, April 1, 2020; and letter from Representatives Steve Shabot and Chris Smith to Attorney General William Barr and Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, April 15, 2020.

[118] World Bank, *Utilization of Repatriated Abacha Loot: Results of the Field Monitoring Exercise*, December 2006.

U.S. Assistance to Nigeria

Nigeria routinely ranks among the top recipients of U.S. foreign assistance globally. The State Department and USAID allocated $451.4 million in bilateral aid for Nigeria in FY2020, nearly 90% of which supported health programs (see **Table 1**). The Administration requested $472.1 million for Nigeria for FY2021, a rare case in Africa in which the Trump Administration's aid proposal exceeded the previous year's allocation. These totals exclude emergency humanitarian assistance and other aid provided through global programs—those not allocated by country in annual State Department Congressional Budget Justifications—or funds managed by other U.S. agencies. The State Department and USAID allocated $468.6 million in humanitarian funding in response to the Lake Chad Basin crisis in FY2019, including $346.9 million for Nigeria.[119]

Table 1. State Department- and USAID-Administered Assistance to Nigeria

selected non-humanitarian accounts, current $ in millions, allocations by year of appropriation

Account	FY2017 (act.)	FY2018 (act.)	FY2019 (act.)	FY2020 (act.)	FY2021 (req.)
DA	80.5	92.0	74.5	50.0	-
ESF/ESDF	45.5	0	0	0	34.0
FMF	0.5	0	0	0	0
GHP-State	224.8	199.6	353.4	181.2	300.0
GHP-USAID	203.5	199.0	222.5	212.0	134.1
IMET	1.0	1.1	1.0	1.2	1.0
INCLE	5.0	6.0	7.0	7.0	3.0
TOTAL	**560.8**	**497.7**	**658.4**	**451.4**	**472.1**

Source: State Department, Congressional Budget Justifications for FY2019-FY2021 and 653(a) report.

Notes: DA=Development Assistance; ESDF=Economic Support and Development Fund; ESF=Economic Support Fund; FMF=Foreign Military Financing; GHP=Global Health Programs; IMET=International Military Education and Training; INCLE=International Narcotics Control and Law Enforcement. The ESDF account, which the Trump Administration has proposed in successive budget requests, would merge various economic assistance accounts, including DA and ESF. To date, Congress has maintained the existing economic assistance account structure.

Nigeria is a focus country under the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) as well as Feed the Future, an agriculture development program. U.S. assistance under the Power Africa initiative has supported gas and solar power generation, off-grid energy projects, and regulatory reform.[120]

U.S. Security Assistance and Military Sales

U.S. security assistance to Nigeria has sought to bolster peacekeeping capacity, enhance maritime and border security, combat transnational crime, support civilian law enforcement, and strengthen counterterrorism efforts. Nigeria participates in the State Department's Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP, an interagency effort to build regional counterterrorism capabilities and coordination), but has not been a top recipient of funds under the program. Nigeria also has benefitted from the provision of U.S. training and equipment to the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) coalition in the Lake Chad Basin. In addition to funds

[119] USAID, "Lake Chad Basin – Complex Emergency," *Fact Sheet #5, FY2019*, September 30, 2019.

[120] USAID, "Nigeria: Power Africa Fact Sheet," accessed June 22, 2020.

administered by the State Department, DOD has notified Congress of roughly $50 million in planned security assistance for Nigeria under its "global train and equip" program, currently authorized under 10 U.S.C. 333—considerably less than amounts provided to other Lake Chad Basin countries.[121] Nigeria has received additional DOD assistance through regional programs.

U.S. concerns with human rights abuses by Nigerian security personnel have constrained U.S. security assistance, including counterterrorism aid.[122] In 2014, the Obama Administration blocked a transfer of U.S.-manufactured military helicopters from Israel to Nigeria due to human rights concerns. U.S. security cooperation increased after the 2015 inauguration of President Buhari, who pledged to curtail and investigate abuses, and the following year, the Obama Administration sought congressional approval for the sale of 12 A-29 Super Tucano attack aircraft to Nigeria. The Obama Administration froze the sale in early 2017, however, after a Nigerian jet struck a camp for displaced people during a bombing raid. The Trump Administration revisited that decision, and in late 2017 approved the sale, over opposition from some Members of Congress.[123] President Trump has appeared to downplay human rights concerns regarding the Nigerian military.[124] The aircraft are now in development, and are due for delivery in 2021.

Outlook and Issues for Congress

Despite vast potential, Nigeria faces steep security, economic, and governance challenges. A protracted Islamist conflict in the northeast and mounting intercommunal violence in the Middle Belt have strained a security apparatus weakened by decades of unchecked corruption and spurred massive humanitarian needs. The collapse of global oil prices and disruptions linked to COVID-19 have dimmed Nigeria's economic prospects. Constrained by a limited fiscal space, the government may struggle to cushion the impacts of these shocks, which observers expect to hit hardest among the most vulnerable households. It is unclear whether the twin crises may hasten or impede longstanding efforts to diversify the economy away from hydrocarbons. In the near term, rising unemployment and other economic hardships appear likely to aggravate social and political tensions, particularly among Nigeria's youthful and rapidly growing labor force.

How Nigerian authorities respond to mounting security challenges and political pressures may have consequences for U.S. policy and engagement. Notwithstanding the Trump Administration's approval of a military aircraft sale in 2017, its designation of Nigeria pursuant to the IFRA and CSPA and imposition of sanctions surrounding flawed elections attest to growing U.S. concerns with human rights and governance conditions in Nigeria. Several Members of Congress also have expressed alarm over deteriorating press and religious freedoms in the country. At the same time, Nigeria remains a critical U.S. security, development, and economic partner in Africa and a top U.S. aid recipient globally. Some Members may assess whether U.S. engagement and assistance reflect an appropriate ranking and balance of priorities in Nigeria. Congress also may debate the relative effectiveness of various tools for advancing U.S. interests in Nigeria, including legislative action, diplomacy, foreign assistance (and restrictions thereof), and punitive measures.

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[121] CRS calculation based on DOD congressional notifications.

[122] In 2014, the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations held a hearing on abuses by Nigerian security forces and U.S. vetting pursuant to the "Leahy Laws," which prohibit U.S. security assistance to security forces credibly accused of gross human rights violations. House Foreign Affairs Committee Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, *Human Rights Vetting: Nigeria and Beyond*, 113th Cong., 2nd sess., July 10, 2014.

[123] Letter from Senators Cory Booker and Rand Paul to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, June 8, 2017.

[124] White House, "Remarks by President Trump and President Buhari of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in Joint Press Conference," April 30, 2018.

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