Nigeria: Key Issues and U.S. Policy

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SUMMARY

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Nigeria: Key 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. partnership with Nigeria as among the most important bilateral relationships on the continent: Nigeria is the United States' second-largest trade partner and third-largest destination for U.S. foreign direct investment in Africa, and it routinely ranks among the top annual recipients of U.S. foreign assistance globally. Poor governance, conflict, and human rights abuses in Nigeria have attracted attention from Members of Congress and pose challenges for U.S. engagement.

People and Politics. Nigeria is poised to overtake the United States as the third most populous country in the world by 2050, with a population expected to exceed 400 million. Its population of 219 million is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse. Contestation over the distribution of political power and public resources among this diverse population has significantly shaped Nigeria's politics and governance system.

Nigeria has been a multiparty republic since 1999, after decades of military rule. Governance has improved in many respects since the 1999 transition, yet repression of political opponents and journalists, corruption, and security force abuses persist. In 2015, Nigeria experienced its first electoral transfer of power between parties with the election of President Muhammadu Buhari. Buhari won reelection in 2019, in polls that featured low turnout, violence, and allegations of pervasive vote-buying and therefore fueled concerns among observers over Nigeria's democratic trajectory. The next general elections are due in 2023. In Nigeria's multiparty era, major political parties have often rotated candidates for office, including the presidency, on a regional basis—one of several ethno-regional power-sharing arrangements that distinguish Nigeria's federal system.

Security. Nigeria faces serious security challenges on several fronts. In the northeast, fighting between government forces and two armed Islamist insurgencies—Boko Haram and an Islamic State-affiliated splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province—has killed tens of thousands of civilians, displaced millions, and involved extensive human rights abuses. In northwest and central Nigeria, an escalation of disputes between herders and farmers has contributed to a deterioration of security conditions characterized by armed criminality, ethno-religious violence, mass abductions for ransom, and emergent Islamist extremist activity, amid rising interethnic and interreligious tensions. In the southeast, violence between security forces and armed separatists killed dozens in 2020-2021. The oil-rich Niger Delta, to the south, has long faced criminality and episodic militancy. The waters off southern Nigeria rank among the world's most dangerous for attacks on vessels. Insecurity has strained Nigeria's security forces. Perpetrators of violence have in many cases eluded prosecution, as military and law enforcement authorities often have struggled to investigate and prosecute attacks. Security forces have reportedly committed extensive abuses, exacerbating local grievances and raising challenges for U.S. partnership programs.

Economy. With extensive oil and gas reserves, high potential in the agriculture and manufacturing sectors, and a rapidly growing population, Nigeria is arguably equipped to emerge as a global economic powerhouse. Nonetheless, Nigeria faces stark economic and development challenges: it is home to one of the world's largest extremely poor populations, and a major share of the population lacks access to basic services, such as improved water, toiletry, and electricity. Some development indicators have worsened in recent years, amid rapid population growth. Dependence on petroleum exports makes Nigeria's economy highly vulnerable to changes in global oil prices. Economic shocks linked to Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) have slowed growth and heightened poverty; the country's near-term outlook is uncertain as the government struggles to expand COVID-19 vaccinations and as Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 has roiled global fuel and food markets.

U.S. Assistance. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)-administered aid allocated for Nigeria included $450 million in FY2020 appropriations, mostly for health programs. This figure does not include regionally- and centrally-managed funds, such as humanitarian aid; the United States has committed over $2 billion in emergency assistance for Nigeria since FY2015. It also excludes funds administered by other U.S. federal departments and agencies, including extensive security assistance administered by the Department of Defense (DOD).

Congress. Recent congressional attention on Nigeria has centered on terrorist threats, elections and other governance issues, human rights, and humanitarian conditions. Some Members have expressed concern over governance and human rights trends, including through legislation in the 117th Congress (e.g., H.Res. 235, S.Res. 241, and §6428 of H.R. 4350 [the House-passed National Defense Authorization Act for FY2022, a provision that was not adopted in the final bill, P.L. 117-81]). Military sales to Nigeria have been a focus of congressional scrutiny; in 2021, some Members of Congress reportedly placed a pre-notification hold on a proposed sale of military helicopters to Nigeria.

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Introduction

With Africa's largest economy, among the most extensive proven oil and gas reserves in the world, and a population on pace to exceed 400 million by mid-century, Nigeria's economic and demographic heft position it to play a major role on the regional and global stages. Stark governance and security challenges cloud this outlook, however, amid widening development gaps: Nigeria has one of the world's largest populations living in extreme poverty, projected at roughly 100 million—nearly half the country's population, and accounting for about one-quarter of Africa's poor.[1] By virtue of Nigeria's demographic size and influence beyond its borders, the achievement of major global development aims, such as the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals, may depend to a considerable extent on whether Nigeria can reach its vast economic potential. Similarly, the attainment of longstanding U.S. security, development, and public health objectives in Africa arguably hinges on the advancement of such goals in Nigeria.

In recent years, deteriorating security conditions and other challenges have spurred pessimism on the part of some outside observers, as well as among Nigerians: according to Afrobarometer, a regional polling organization, nearly 70% of Nigerians surveyed in early 2020 believed their country was going in the wrong direction.[2] Some analysts have argued that Nigeria is a failing or failed state; others disagree, pointing to areas of progress or resilience.[3] Such debates are not new—political and security crises have animated periodic concern over Nigeria's viability and territorial integrity since the country's independence from the United Kingdom in 1960—and they are likely to persist as Nigeria continues to confront formidable governance, economic, and security challenges. In the meantime, Congress might consider how the United States can best advance U.S. interests and sustain past investments amid deteriorating human rights conditions, rising insecurity, and scarce resources and divergent priorities on the part of Nigerian authorities.

Demography

With an estimated 219 million people, Nigeria is the most populous country in Africa and sixth most populous globally.[4] By 2050, it is poised to overtake the United States as the third most populous country (behind India and China), with a populace projected to exceed 400 million.[5] Around three in five Nigerians are below the age of 25, raising the possibility of a "demographic dividend" in the coming decades—contingent upon the capacity of Nigeria's government and economy to provide a rapidly growing populace with quality services and livelihoods.[6]

Nigeria's population is highly diverse, comprising hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups. There are no official statistics on ethnic or religious affiliation; efforts to collect such data have been

[1] Jonathan Lain and Tara Vishwanath, "Tackling poverty in multiple dimensions: A proving ground in Nigeria?" World Bank Blogs, January 7, 2021.

[2] Afrobarometer, "Summary of Results: Afobarometer Round 8 Survey in Nigeria, 2020," 2021.

[3] On Nigeria as a failed or failing state, see *Financial Times*, "Nigeria is at risk of becoming a failed state," December 22, 2020; Robert I. Rotberg and John Campbell, "Nigeria Is a Failed State," *Foreign Policy*, May 27, 2021. For an opposing view, see Fola Aina and Nic Cheeseman, "Don't Call Nigeria a Failed State," *Foreign Affairs*, May 5, 2021.

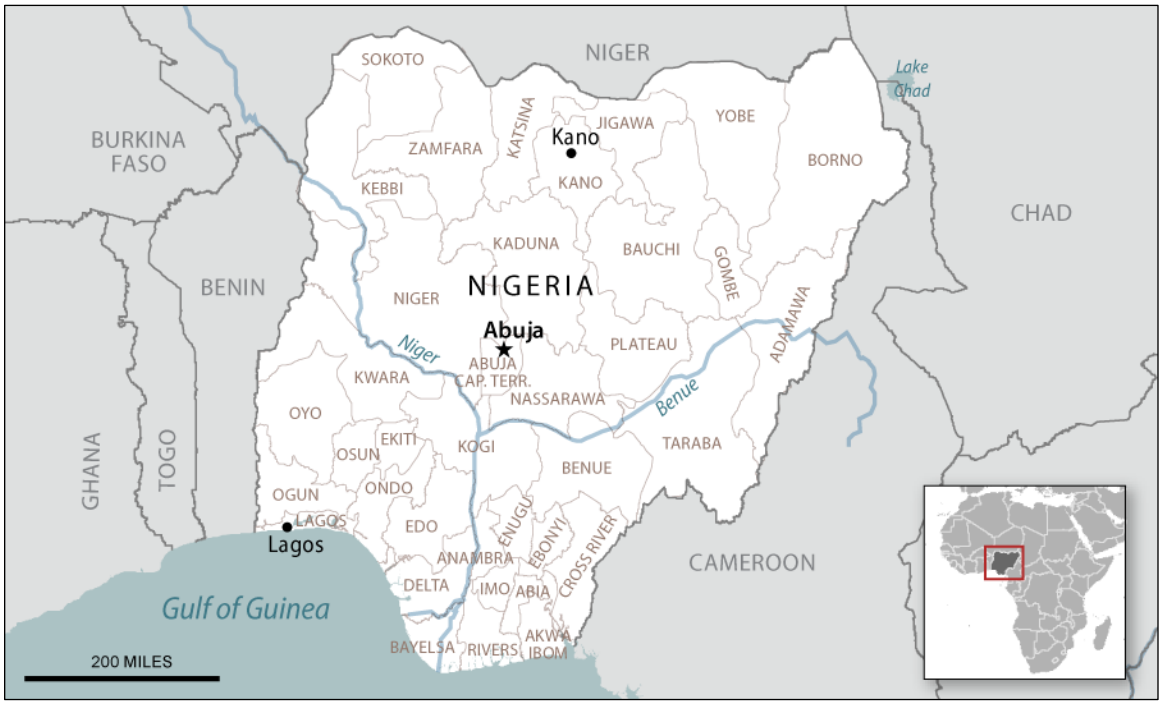
[4] Population estimate from U.S. Census Bureau, International Data Base (IDB), accessed December 30, 2021.

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

[6] A demographic dividend refers to economic growth that can result from a rise in the proportion of working people in a country's population; see U.N. Population Fund, "Demographic dividend," accessed March 22, 2022. Population under 25 figures for Nigeria from U.S. Census Bureau, IDB, accessed December 30, 2021.

highly controversial.[7] Nigeria's largest ethnic groups are the Hausa-Fulani, made up of two groups (the Hausa and Fulani) concentrated in the north whose mutual assimilation has led them to be often, but not always, considered as a single bloc in the context of Nigerian politics;[8] the Yoruba, who predominate in the west; and the Igbo, concentrated in the southeast. Nigerians generally refer to groups outside of these three as minorities. Observers describe Nigeria's population as roughly evenly balanced between Muslims, who are a majority in the north, and Christians, a majority in the south (see "Interfaith Relations and Religious Freedom Concerns").[9]

Figure 1. Nigeria



Source: CRS graphic, using data from the State Department and Esri, a GIS mapping software company.

Politics and Governance

Nigeria has been a multiparty republic since 1999, after three decades of military rule punctuated by recurrent coups and intermittent attempts to restore civilian authority. A federation with 36 states, its political structure resembles that of the United States, with a bicameral National Assembly comprising a 109-member Senate and 360-member House of Representatives.

[7] The last census that produced data on ethnic or religious affiliation in Nigeria occurred in 1963 and featured extensive irregularities. Nigeria's military government annulled the results of a 1973 census exercise, which were widely viewed as fraudulent. Ensuing censuses have excluded questions on ethnicity or religion. Several nongovernment studies have sought to enumerate Nigeria's ethno-religious demography; their methodologies and results are a subject of debate.

[8] The Hausa and Fulani are present in several African countries; the term "Hausa-Fulani" is generally only used when referring to the groups in Nigeria. Some researchers have objected to the "Hausa-Fulani" label. On Hausa-Fulani identity, see Moses Ochonu, "Colonialism within Colonialism: The Hausa-Caliphate Imaginary and the British Colonial Administration of the Nigerian Middle Belt," *African Studies Quarterly* vol. 10, nos. 2-3 (2008): 98-100.

[9] See, e.g., State Department, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nigeria*, 2021.

President Muhammadu Buhari took office in 2015 and won a second four-year term in 2019. A retired army major general from Katsina State in the northwest, Buhari previously took power in a military coup in 1983, before his chief of army staff overthrew him in 1985; he placed second in three consecutive presidential polls before his 2015 victory. His All Progressives Congress (APC) holds majorities in the Senate and House of Representatives and over half of state governorships. The leading opposition party is the People's Democratic Party (PDP), which held the presidency from 1999 to 2015. Parties are not based on firm platforms; party defections are common, "particularly ahead of elections as politicians jockey for the best platform to secure victory."[10]

Federalism and Power-Sharing

Over several decades, Nigeria's political leaders have adopted a number of (formal and informal) institutions that operate to distribute political power and public resources based on ethno-regional inclusion or proportionality. According to one observer, "these efforts have had a major impact on how Nigerians talk about fairness in political life and on how they demand services and benefits from the federal government."[11] These power-sharing institutions and norms are central topics of discussion in Nigerian political debate and public commentary.

A defining feature of Nigeria's governance system is the statutory allocation of many federally collected revenues—notably including oil and gas receipts, which account for a large share of such earnings—to state and local governments. State and local authorities rely heavily on these transfers for financing and associated patronage resources.[12] Disputes persist over the distribution of revenues between and among tiers of government.[13] Discontent with the intergovernmental division of fiscal and other authorities—particularly among state and local government officials dissatisfied with the extent of powers accorded to the federal government—has spurred calls for a "restructuring" of Nigeria's federation, especially to devolve authorities to sub-federal tiers.[14]

Under the "federal character" principle, enshrined in the 1999 constitution, appointments to the civil service and other posts (e.g., the military officer corps) must guarantee "no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups."[15] A Federal Character Commission (FCC) monitors the geographic distribution of state appointments. According to separate (not legally mandated) conventions, political parties often rotate candidates for office on an ethno-regional basis (a practice known as "zoning") and, since the 1999 transition to civilian rule, have often nominated candidates for the executive branch to rotate the presidency between north and south after two terms in office (the "rotational presidency").[16] Both zoning and the

[10] International Republican Institute (IRI), *The Role of Political Parties in Nigeria's Fledgling Democracy*, 2020.

[11] Brandon Kendhammer, "Getting Our Piece of the National Cake: Consociational Power Sharing and Neopatrimonialism in Nigeria," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* vol. 21 (2015): 144.

[12] See regular *Internally Generated Revenue at State Level* reports by Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), at https://www.nigerianstat.gov.ng/.

[13] See, e.g., Simon Kolawole, "The Trouble with Revenue Allocation," *The Cable*, October 9, 2021.

[14] See, e.g., remarks by Kaduna State Governor Nasir Ahmad el-Rufai, "Next Generation Nigeria: What is restructuring and does Nigeria need it?" Chatham House, September 21, 2017.

[15] *Nigeria's Constitution of 1999 with Amendments through 2011*, Chapter II, §3.

[16] Until 1999, northerners had held the presidency for much of Nigeria's post-independence history, mostly as military heads of state. In 1993, the military annulled an election that would have resulted in Nigeria's first government led by an elected president from the south, leading to significant unrest. Some commentators have described the rotational presidency as an important innovation for reducing interethnic tensions and promoting a sense of fairness in the distribution of power; others criticize the convention as unevenly implemented or misguided. See, e.g., Iwok Iniobong, "2023: Nigeria's power rotation controversy rages, amid clamour for competence," *Business Day*, February 25, 2021.

rotational presidency have been a subject of debate, including over which group or zone may be "due" for office. Perceived violations of such conventions have led to conflict. In 2011, frustrated expectations among northerners that a northerner would return to the presidency contributed to post-election riots that killed hundreds along ethnic and sectarian lines.[17]

Ethno-regional power-sharing arrangements in Nigeria are predicated, in part, on the concept of indigeneity, which is enshrined (albeit undefined) in the constitution. By this principle, Nigerians are classified either as "Indigenes," whom the government recognizes as descended from a given area's original inhabitants, or "settlers," considered non-native. State and local authorities issue Indigeneity certificates, a process that can be subject to intense dispute—especially in the case of "settlers" whose families may have lived in an area for generations. By law and by practice, "Indigenes" enjoy preferential access to government employment, political participation, and education; "settlers" are disadvantaged or may be barred entirely from such opportunities.[18] Tensions between "Indigenes" and "settlers" have been a recurrent aspect of violence in Nigeria.

Civic Space and Elections

Nigeria's civic space has expanded since the return of civilian authority in 1999. Today, Nigeria's civil society comprises a broad range of advocacy groups, labor unions, government watchdogs, and ethnic, cultural, and religious associations. Nonetheless, successive Nigerian administrations have curtailed freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press. Activists and journalists have faced terrorism, cybercrime, or other charges for commenting on sensitive issues. The State Department has accused successive governments of using excessive force to disperse protesters.[19]

In 2019, several Members expressed concern over the arrest and trial of journalist and politician Omoyele Sowore, a U.S. permanent resident, following Sowore's call for protests against Buhari.[20] The Buhari administration's violent response to the #EndSARS protests against police brutality in late 2020 drew criticism from several Members, part of a wave of condemnations that followed that crackdown (see **Text Box**). Some Members and other U.S. officials also denounced Buhari's decision, in mid-2021, to ban the use of Twitter in Nigeria after Twitter officials deleted Tweets that Buhari had sent pledging to respond militarily to separatist violence in the southeast (see "Separatism in the Southeast").[21] The government lifted the Twitter ban in January 2022.

[17] The 2011 zoning controversy followed the 2010 death of incumbent President Umaru Yar'Adua, a northerner. He was succeeded by his southern-born Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, who went on to win 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 2011.

[18] On challenges facing non-Indigenes, see annual State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*; see also HRW, *"They Do Not Own This Place": Government Discrimination Against "Non-Indigenes" in Nigeria*, 2006.

[19] See annual State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* since 2000.

[20] Senators Menendez, Schumer, Coons, and Booker and Representatives Gottheimer and Pascrell, Jr., wrote to Nigeria's Attorney General expressing concern over Sowore's arrest. Other Members also expressed concern. In the 117th Congress, S.Res. 241 (as introduced) notes Sowore's case in the context of global press freedom threats.

[21] Representative Karen Bass, "Statement on Twitter Ban in Nigeria," June 9, 2021; see also State Department, "Nigeria's Twitter Suspension," June 10, 2021.

The 2020 #EndSARS Protests[22]

In October 2020, video circulated on social media purporting to document an extrajudicial killing by members of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police unit that human rights groups had previously accused of abuses. The protests that ensued were among the largest popular mobilizations in Nigeria's history; the campaign gained steam as celebrities and world leaders, including some Members of Congress, expressed solidarity.[23] The Buhari administration responded by dissolving SARS and announcing other police reforms, while deploying security forces to disperse demonstrations; witnesses accused authorities of recruiting or permitting gangs to attack protesters.[24]

The protests culminated on October 20, when police and military personnel reportedly used live fire to disperse demonstrators gathered at the Lekki Tollgate and Alausa areas of Lagos State.[25] Observers accused security forces of killing multiple civilians; in a 2021 report, a state-convened panel of inquiry described the events as a "massacre" and accused authorities stymieing the panel's investigation.[26] Federal and Lagos State officials have denied reports of civilian fatalities. To date, no security personnel have faced charges for abuses against #EndSARS protesters.

Nigeria has held six general elections since the return of civilian rule. Some observers described the 2019 polls, in which Buhari won reelection, as a regression in Nigeria's democratic trajectory and a missed opportunity to build on the successes of the 2015 polls—which, despite flaws, were widely considered the most credible in Nigeria's history.[27] Disinformation, inflammatory rhetoric, and violence marred the pre-election period ahead of the 2019 elections; concerns on election day included vote buying, ballot secrecy violations, and irregularities in ballot collation, according to U.S.-funded election observers.[28] After the polls, the State Department imposed visa restrictions on unnamed individuals "believed to be responsible for, or complicit in, undermining democracy in Nigeria."[29] In late 2020, the State Department imposed additional visa restrictions on unnamed individuals for undermining subsequent state-level elections in Kogi and Bayelsa States.[30]

The next general elections are due in 2023. President Buhari is ineligible to run due to a two-term limit. Whether Nigeria's political class will adhere to the rotational presidency arrangement in 2023 is a key question, with implications for political coalition-building and public perceptions of one of Nigeria's defining power-sharing institutions. After two terms by a president of northern origins, some politicians and commentators argue that the post is "due" to the south.[31] Others contend that Nigeria should abandon the rotation arrangement in 2023.[32]

[22] For more, see CRS Insight IN11525, *Nigeria: #EndSARS Protests Against Police Brutality*, by Tomás F. Husted.

[23] Several Members Tweeted in support of the #EndSARS protests and accountability for police abuses in Nigeria. In the 117th Congress, H.Res. 235 would express support for the demands of the #EndSARS protesters, among other aims.

[24] Sam Olukoya, "Protesters attacked in Nigerian demos against police abuse," Associated Press, October 15, 2020.

[25] Stephanie Busari et al., "'They pointed their guns at us and started shooting,'" *CNN*, November 19, 2020.

[26] Lagos State Judicial Panel of Inquiry on Restitution for Victims of SARS Related Abuses and Other Matters, *Report of Lekki Incident Investigation of 20th October 2020*, 2021.

[27] National Democratic Institute (NDI) and International Republican Institute (IRI), *Nigeria International Election Observation Mission Final Report*, 2019.

[28] Ibid.

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

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

[31] Dapo Akinrefon, "Power must shift to South in 2023 - Southern, Middle Belt leaders," *Vanguard*, February 11, 2022.

[32] Boluwaji Obahopo, "Rotational Presidency is unconstitutional, let Nigerians make their choice – Gov Bello," *Vanguard*, July 9, 2021.

Corruption and U.S. Kleptocracy Recovery Efforts

Corruption in Nigeria is reportedly pervasive, and it has been the focus of extensive research, commentary, and civic activism.[33] Surveys indicate widespread suspicion of public office-holders and other government officials.[34] Various studies have sought to quantify the costs of corruption in Nigeria or in specific sectors of the economy, using various methodologies.[35]

Several state agencies work to combat corruption, including the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which has been a focus of U.S. assistance and has collaborated with U.S. agencies in law enforcement actions (see "Cybercrime, Financial Crime, and U.S. Responses"). These agencies have seized billions of dollars' worth of ill-gotten assets and prosecuted a number of current and former officials. Analysts have identified several challenges impeding their work, however, including political interference, resource gaps, and a slow-moving justice system.[36]

President Buhari, who campaigned on a pledge to root out graft, arguably has amassed a mixed anti-corruption record while in office. During his tenure, anti-corruption agencies have brought charges and/or secured convictions against several high-level officials. The Buhari administration also has worked with foreign partners, including the United States, to repatriate the proceeds of past corruption (see **Text Box**). Nevertheless, some observers allege that Buhari has tolerated corruption by his own allies; his cabinet includes several figures previously accused of corrupt practices. His government also has maintained the use of certain practices that analysts describe as prone to diversion or waste, such as off-budget funds for security-related expenses.[37]

U.S. Kleptocracy Recovery Efforts

The U.S. Government has acted to seize and recover proceeds of corruption in Nigeria located in or laundered through the United States, and to repatriate such funds for the benefit of the Nigerian people. U.S. attention has centered, in large part, on assets acquired by former military leader Sani Abacha and his co-conspirators, who embezzled billions of dollars in public funds during Abacha's rule (from 1993 until his death in 1998). In 2013, the Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a civil forfeiture suit against over $625 million in assets belonging to Abacha and his associates; pursuant to that suit, in 2014, DOJ seized roughly $480 million in assets allegedly laundered through U.S. banks and stored in multiple jurisdictions.[38] DOJ has sought to enforce this judgment, and some seized funds have been repatriated to Nigeria: in 2020, DOJ transferred nearly $312 million seized in the Isle of Jersey, a UK dependency, to the Nigerian government.[39] DOJ has seized U.S. assets belonging to other Nigerian elites, including current Kebbi State governor Abubakar Atiku Bagudu, two former governors, and a former petroleum minister.

Some Members of Congress have expressed concern over the possible diversion of funds repatriated to Nigeria.[40] Particular scrutiny has centered on efforts by Nigerian authorities to transfer roughly $110 million in funds seized

[33] On patterns of corruption in Nigeria, see Matthew T. Page, *A New Taxonomy for Corruption in Nigeria*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP), 2018.

[34] Afrobarometer, for instance, reports that nearly 60% of Nigerians believe most or all National Assembly members are corrupt (Afrobarometer, Round 7 data). See also Transparency International's annual Corruption Perceptions Index.

[35] See, for instance, U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime, *Corruption in Nigeria: Patterns and Trends*, 2019; PwC, *Impact of Corruption on Nigeria's Economy*, 2016.

[36] See, among others, Matthew T. Page, *Innovative or Ineffective? Reassessing Anti-Corruption Law Enforcement in Nigeria*, Global Integrity Anti-Corruption Evidence (GI-ACE) Research Program, 2021.

[37] Matthew T. Page, *Camouflaged Cash: How 'Security Votes' Fuel Corruption in Nigeria*, Transparency International, 2018; see also Center for Democracy and Development, *Buhari's Anti-Corruption Record at Six Years*, 2021.

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

[39] 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.

[40] Letters from Senator Charles Grassley to then-Director Deborah Connor, DOJ Money Laundering and Asset

in the UK to Governor Bagudu, a top Abacha co-conspirator, pursuant to domestic agreements reached with Bagudu.[41] U.S. authorities have opposed the proposed transfer to Bagudu, and are reportedly pursuing legal efforts to seize the funds.[42] More broadly, Nigerian civil society groups have sought clarification on the disposition of returned assets, alleging a lack of transparency in the use of repatriated funds.[43]

Interfaith Relations and Religious Freedom Concerns

According to Pew Research Center polling, 93% of Nigerians surveyed in 2019 stated that religion was very important in their lives, among the highest rates globally.[44] As noted above, Muslims and Christians constitute large majorities in the north and south, respectively, though there are significant populations of Muslims in the south, and of Christians in the north. There is extensive intra-religious diversity, such as between and within Sufi, Salafi, Shia, and heterodox Muslims, and Catholics and Protestants of various denominations. Smaller groups of Nigerians practice other global or Indigenous religions or report no religious affiliation. According to the State Department, many Nigerians "syncretize indigenous animism with Islam or Christianity."[45]

In general, Nigeria has a long history of religious tolerance and nonviolent conflict resolution between faith groups; according to one analysis, "most of the time, and in most places, Nigerians with diverging religious convictions live and work together peacefully."[46] A 2020 Afrobarometer survey found that a large majority of Nigerian respondents would be content or would not care if their neighbor practiced a religion other than their own.[47] State discrimination along religious lines has periodically roiled interfaith relations, however, and Nigeria has seen violence along religious lines, particularly in religiously mixed zones of the north. That sectarian affiliation and ethnic identity often overlap can make it difficult to distinguish the role of religious animus as opposed to other forms of discrimination (e.g., anti-"settler" ethnic bias) during such events.

In 2019, the Trump Administration placed Nigeria on a "Special Watch List" for religious freedom concerns under the International Religious Freedom Act (IRFA, P.L. 105-292, as amended). In 2020, it named Nigeria a Country of Particular Concern (CPC) for "having engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom." Designation as a CPC can result in various punitive measures (e.g., aid cuts), subject to a waiver; President Trump waived any such measures for Nigeria, citing the U.S. interest.[48] The Biden Administration did not

Recovery Section, April 1, 2020 and June 29, 2020; letter from Representatives Steve Chabot and Christopher Smith to then-Attorney General William P. Barr and then-Secretary of State Michael Pompeo, April 15, 2020.

[41] William Clowes, "U.S. Opposes Nigeria Plan to Hand Looted Funds to Governor," *Bloomberg*, February 21, 2020; and William Clowes, "U.K. Toes U.S. Line to Block Looted Funds for Nigeria Governor," *Bloomberg*, April 6, 2020.

[42] DOJ, "U.S. Enters into Trilateral Agreement with Nigeria and Jersey to Repatriate Over $300 Million to Nigeria in Assets Stolen by Former Nigerian Dictator General Sani Abacha," February 3, 2020; William Clowes, "U.S. to Proceed With Case to Seize Nigerian Governor's Funds," *Bloomberg*, March 8, 2022.

[43] *The Guardian (Nigeria)*, "Return £4.2m Ibori loot to Delta State, Reps orders FG," March 11, 2021.

[44] Pew Research Center, "The Global God Divide," July 20, 2020.

[45] State Department, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom: Nigeria*.

[46] Abdul Raufu Mustapha and David Ehrhardt, "Diversity, Religious Pluralism, & Democracy," in *Creed & Grievance: Muslim-Christian Relations and & Conflict Resolution in Northern Nigeria*, ed. Abdul Raufu Mustapha and David Ehrhardt (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2018): 341.

[47] Afrobarometer, "Nigerians show high tolerance for diversity but low trust in fellow citizens, Afrobarometer study shows," March 10, 2021.

[48] State Department, "Secretary of State's Determinations under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016," January 13, 2021. See also CRS In Focus IF10803, *Global Human Rights: International Religious Freedom Policy*, by Michael A. Weber.

designate Nigeria as a CPC in 2021. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), an independent agency created by Congress, criticized Nigeria's delisting.[49]

The specific grounds for Nigeria's CPC designation (and subsequent delisting) were not made public. Annual State Department religious freedom and human rights reports have highlighted various issues related to interfaith relations and religious freedom in Nigeria, including:

Issues related to *sharia* law. Nigeria has a plural legal system in which English law, customary law (derived from customs in ethnic communities), and, in the north, *sharia* (Islamic) law govern concurrently. Muslims in northern Nigeria have observed a form of *sharia* for centuries, though the jurisdiction of *sharia* courts was limited to personal matters (e.g., marital disputes) after independence. After Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, several state governments in the north reintroduced *sharia* criminal codes, which now operate in 12 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory. The introduction of *sharia* criminal codes was controversial, and prompted interreligious clashes in parts of the north, notably in the religiously mixed Kaduna State.

Sharia courts may not compel participation by non-Muslims, though non-Muslims may elect to have cases tried in *sharia* courts.[50] Non-Muslims and Shia Muslims—a minority in the majority Sunni north (see below)—reportedly have experienced discrimination in the context of *sharia* enforcement.[51] Religious freedom organizations have expressed particular concern over periodic prosecutions of blasphemy, which is illegal under both *sharia* and customary law.[52] Secular courts of appeal have overturned several high-profile blasphemy convictions.

Anti-Shia repression. Nigeria's minority Shia Muslim community is concentrated in the northwest of the country, and many belong to the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), a group led by outspoken cleric Ibrahim Zakzaky, a longtime critic of the Nigerian government. Since Zakzaky's rise to prominence in the 1970s, he and his supporters have been involved in periodic clashes with state authorities as well as members of the Sunni community, which comprises a majority of Nigeria's Muslim population. Zakzaky has been arrested on several occasions.[53]

Human rights groups have repeatedly accused security forces of using excessive force to disperse IMN gatherings. In 2014, for instance, soldiers reportedly fired on IMN members in Kaduna State, killing 35 people, including three of Zakzaky's sons.[54] In 2015, following a confrontation with IMN members over a roadblock, the military reportedly killed nearly 350 IMN members in Kaduna and arrested Zakzaky and hundreds of others, charging Zakzaky with murder and other

[49] USCIRF, "USCIRF Appalled at Administration's Removal of Nigeria from List of Violators of Religious Freedom," November 17, 2021.

[50] Some non-Muslims report a preference for *sharia* courts, viewing them as more efficient and less corrupt than secular courts. See 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*, 2019.

[51] USCIRF, *Shari'ah Criminal Law*; annual State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* since 2000.

[52] USCIRF, "USCIRF Condemns Death Sentence for Yahaya Sharif-Aminu on Blasphemy Charges," August 11, 2020; UNICEF, "UNICEF statement on sentencing of 13-year-old child to 10-years' imprisonment with 'menial labour' for blasphemy," September 16, 2020.

[53] The extent of Zakzaky's ties with Iran, and the possible implications of such ties for Iranian political and religious influence in Nigeria, have been subject to speculation in light of Zakzaky's professed support for Iran's government and virulent anti-U.S., anti-Israel, and anti-Semitic rhetoric. Iranian officials have expressed support for Zakzaky, and analysts contend that Iran has provided material support for the IMN, though the extent of such funding is unclear. See, e.g., Donna Abu-Nasr, "As Trump Makes Threats, Iran Makes Friends," *Bloomberg*, March 8, 2017; Jacob Zenn, "A Shia "Boko Haram" Insurgency or Iranian Proxy in Nigeria? Not So Fast," *Jamestown Foundation*, July 26, 2019.

[54] State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014: Nigeria*, 2015.

crimes.[55] Security forces killed dozens and arrested hundreds in response to ensuing IMN protests calling for Zakzaky's release.[56] A state court acquitted Zakzaky of all charges in 2021.

Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (IS-WA). The State Department has designated Boko Haram and IS-WA "entities of particular concern" for committing "particularly severe" religious freedom violations.[57] (For background on Boko Haram and IS-WA, see "Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province," below.) Boko Haram's founder preached an "exclusivist" form of Salafist Sunni Islam, rejecting Western influence and Christianity as well as more moderate forms of Islam.[58] The group has threatened and assassinated Muslim leaders, including mainstream Salafis, for opposing the group, and has killed hundreds of Muslims in attacks on mosques.[59] IS-WA split from Boko Haram in part citing objection to the practice of killing Muslims, and has generally focused attacks on state targets and Christians—though it, too, has attacked unaffiliated Muslims and forced local civilians to follow its religious precepts.[60]

Both Boko Haram and IS-WA have threatened, kidnapped, and killed Christians, including clergy and other leaders. They have destroyed numerous churches. Christians were among the victims of two mass kidnappings that have attracted sustained interest from Congress: 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. Dozens of those abducted in Chibok remain missing; of those abducted in Dapchi, all have been released except a Christian, Leah Sharibu, whom IS-WA reportedly has kept in captivity due to her refusal to convert to Islam.[61] In the 117th Congress, H.Res. 319 would recognize the seventh anniversary of the Chibok kidnapping and call for the release of the remaining Chibok abductees and of Sharibu.

Middle Belt violence. Nigeria's religiously and ethnically diverse "Middle Belt," an informal, variously defined zone of central Nigeria straddling the predominately Muslim north and the largely Christian south, has long been a theater for interreligious conflict. For decades, concerns in this region largely centered on recurrent riots and urban violence between Muslims and Christians, often sparked by "an event of religious significance" such as an instance of alleged blasphemy.[62] Such violence has often coincided with ethnic disputes between "Indigenes" and "settlers" over the rightful "ownership" of territory and related issues, such as land use and elections (see "Federalism and Power-Sharing," above). In the Middle Belt, "Indigenes" are often Christians, of various ethnic groups, while many "settlers" are ethnic Hausa-Fulani Muslims.

[55] HRW, "Nigeria: End Impunity for Killings of Shia," December 12, 2018.

[56] Dionne Searcey and Emmanuel Akinwotu, "Nigeria Says Soldiers Who Killed Marchers Were Provoked. Video Shows Otherwise," *New York Times*, December 17, 2018.

[57] State Department, "Secretary of State's Determinations under the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 and Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act of 2016," January 13, 2021.

[58] Alex Thurston, *"The Disease is Unbelief": Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview*, The Brookings Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, 2016.

[59] Alex Thurston, "Nigeria's Mainstream Salafis between Boko Haram and the State," *Islamic Africa* vol. 6 (2015): 109-134.

[60] Bulama Bukarti, "ISWA's Recent Attacks Could Signal a New, Deadlier Approach in Nigeria," Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Blog, June 19, 2020; *Deutsche Welle*, "Islamic militant attacks in Borno kill dozens," June 14, 2020; International Crisis Group (ICG), *Facing the Challenge of the Islamic State in West Africa Province*, 2019.

[61] Chika Oduah, "'She refused to convert to Islam,' 85 days on, kidnapped schoolgirl Leah Sharibu remains in captivity," *CNN*, May 15, 2018.

[62] Laura Thaut Vinson, "Pastoralism, Ethnicity, and Subnational Conflict Resolution in the Middle Belt," in A. Carl Levan and Patrick Ukata, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics* (Oxford University Press, 2019): 682.

In the past decade, observer attention has focused on intercommunal violence between Muslim, ethnic Fulani herders and Christian farmers (see "Rural Insecurity: Herder-Farmer Conflict and "Banditry"). Many analysts contend that religious ideology generally is not a primary driver of such conflicts, which appear to stem primarily from disputes over resource control pitting "Indigene" groups against "settler" Fulani.[63] Nonetheless, the violence has aggravated sectarian tensions and spurred killing along religious lines. The State Department reports that "Christian groups stated that Muslim Fulani herdsman were targeting Christian farmers because of their religion. Local Muslim and herder organizations said unaffiliated Fulani were the targets of Christian revenge killings."[64]

Security Challenges

The sections below provide overviews of selected security issues in Nigeria that have attracted attention from Members of Congress and other U.S. policymakers. Some challenges, such as the Boko Haram/IS-WA conflict, human and drug trafficking, and financial and cybercrime, have consequences that extend beyond Nigeria's borders. Some general trends may be observed across patterns of insecurity and government responses:

Security forces are under strain. Nigeria's military is deployed to all 36 of Nigeria's states on internal security operations, stretching thin a force estimated to comprise 143,000 active duty personnel.[65] Defense spending has risen over the past decade, and the government has expanded its military capabilities with the acquisition of new ground and air assets, but the military often has struggled to restore stability and state authority in zones cleared during periodic offensives. Some analysts have called for extensive military reform to address issues related to funding, leadership, oversight, and personnel training, deployment, and welfare.[66] Surveys indicate low troop morale and discontent with poor equipment and living conditions, infrequent rotation, and other issues.[67] Nigeria's national police force is under-resourced, and many officers are deployed as private security, resulting in a reliance on the military for law enforcement tasks.

Corruption is a key challenge. Procurement fraud, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption have reportedly drained defense sector resources.[68] By many accounts, there is little transparency into defense budgeting and procurement; several military officers have been convicted of self-enrichment. Off-budget expenditures are common. Transparency International has described Nigeria's legislature as "largely passive and compliant" in its oversight of defense issues.[69]

[63] A literature review by Search for Common Ground (SFCG), a U.S. NGO engaged in conflict prevention efforts in the Middle Belt, found "broad consensus that while religious divisions are a contributing source of conflict between pastoralist and non-pastoralist ethnic groups [in Nigeria], they are not the sole or primary cause." See Leif Brottem and Andrew McDonnell, *Pastoralism and Conflict in the Sudano-Sahel: A Review of the Literature*, SFCG, 2020. For an analysis that emphasizes the role of religious divisions in the violence, see UK All-Party Parliamentary Group for International Freedom of Religion or Belief, *Nigeria: Unfolding Genocide?*, 2020.

[64] U.S. Department of State, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria*, 2021.

[65] International Institute for Security Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2022*, 2022.

[66] ICG, *Nigeria: The Challenge of Military Reform*, 2016; Matthew Page, "Nigeria's New Military Chiefs Face Uphill Battle," Chatham House, February 11, 2021. July 14, 2020. In 2021, Nigeria's Defense Ministry commissioned two panels to provide recommendations related to defense sector reform; the outcomes of that effort remains to be seen.

[67] Temitope B. Oriola, "Nigerian Soldiers on the War Against Boko Haram," *African Affairs* vol. 120 no. 479 (2021).

[68] Eva Anderson and Matthew T. Page, *Weaponising Transparency: Defense Procurement Reform as a Counterterrorism Strategy in Nigeria*, Transparency International (TI) Defense and Security, 2017.

[69] TI Defense and Security, *Government Defense Integrity Index 2020: Nigeria*, 2021.

Security forces have committed extensive abuses. Observers have accused Nigerian security forces of extrajudicial killings, torture, and other human rights violations.[70] Human rights groups estimate that thousands have died in Nigerian military custody since 2011.[71] The State Department reports that security force impunity is a "significant problem."[72]

Militia activity has expanded. Vigilante groups have emerged in conflict-affected zones across the country, varying in size, formality, legality, and government backing. In the northeast, for instance, members of the Civilian Joint Task Force (C-JTF), which organized to help combat Boko Haram, have received state support and participated in military operations.[73] Human rights organizations have accused vigilantes of extrajudicial killings and other human rights abuses, and prospects for their future demobilization are uncertain.[74]

Impunity is widespread. Perpetrators of violence often have eluded prosecution, as authorities have in many cases proved unable or unwilling to hold instigators to account.[75] Where authorities have intervened, human rights groups have repeatedly accused security forces of conducting arbitrary mass arrests following episodes of violence.[76] In some cases, authorities have released suspects without charge once tensions cooled.[77] In others, detainees—including thousands arrested for alleged ties to Boko Haram—have remained in pre-trial detention for years, often in inhumane conditions.[78] Several thousand Boko Haram suspects faced prosecution in three mass trials held in 2017-2018 that resulted in hundreds of convictions; observers raised concerns with those trials and assessed that prosecutions primarily targeted civilians or low-level offenders.[79]

[70] See, e.g., State Department, annual *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* since 2009.

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

[72] State Department, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

[73] Daniel Agbiboa, "The Precariousness of Protection: Civilian Defense Groups Countering Boko Haram in Northeastern Nigeria," *African Studies Review* vol. 64, No. 1 (2021): 192-216.

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

[75] For instance, an analysis of commissions of inquiry established following repeated episodes of violence in Plateau State between 1997 and 2014 found that, in general, "the recommendation to the government to investigate and prosecute perpetrators and instigators of violence has not been implemented." Marjoke Oosterom and Dung Pam Sha, "Commissions of Inquiry in Plateau State, Nigeria," IDS Working Paper vol. 2019, No. 531, 2019.

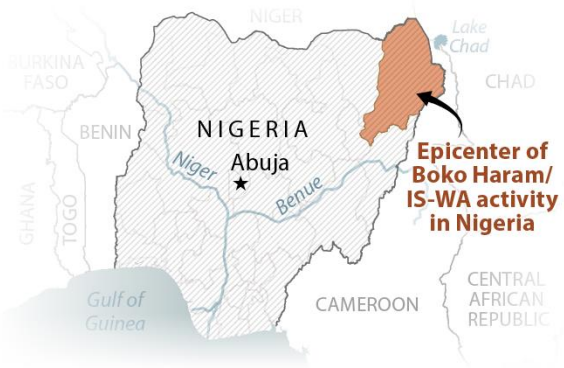
[76] Annual State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* have consistently documented instances of arbitrary arrests by Nigerian security forces.

[77] HRW, *"Leave Everything to God": Accountability for Inter-Communal Violence in Plateau and Kaduna States, Nigeria*, 2013; AI, *Harvest of Death: Three Years of Bloody Clashes Between Farmers and Herders in Nigeria*, 2018.

[78] AI, *"We Dried Our Tears."*

[79] HRW, "Nigeria: Flawed Trials of Boko Haram Suspects," September 17, 2018; Allan Ngari and Akinola Olojo, *Besieged but Not Relenting: Ensuring Fair Trials for Nigeria's Terrorism Suspects*, Institute for Security Studies, 2020.

Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province[80]



Founded in the early 2000s as a Salafist Sunni Muslim reform movement, *Jama'tu Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad* (JAS)—more commonly known as Boko Haram, which roughly translates to "Western culture is forbidden"—evolved beginning in 2009 into one of the world's deadliest extremist groups. Violence involving Nigerian security forces, Boko Haram, and an Islamic State-affiliated splinter faction, the Islamic State West Africa Province (IS-WA), is reported to have killed over 40,000 people in Nigeria, mostly civilians, in the past decade.[81] Boko Haram and IS-WA have kidnapped thousands more.[82] Additionally, Amnesty International has estimated that "likely more than 10,000" people, including many children, have died in Nigerian custody during the conflict.[83] Northeast Nigeria has been the epicenter of the conflict (see map above), though violence has spilled over Nigeria's borders with neighboring Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. The State Department has designated Boko Haram and IS-WA as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists.

More than a decade since the onset of conflict in 2009, prospects for an end to hostilities remain tenuous. Since splitting from Boko Haram in 2016, IS-WA has come to surpass Boko Haram in capacity and size. As of early 2022, U.N. monitors estimated IS-WA to have 4,000-5,000 fighters.[84] The group regularly attacks military facilities, killing soldiers and looting materiel, and funds itself through raiding, kidnapping for ransom, and taxing local populations and commerce. Primarily active in northeast Nigeria, IS-WA also continues to mount attacks in neighboring countries, primarily targeting local military positions. U.N. investigators report that IS-WA has links to another IS faction, known as IS-Greater Sahara, active in Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, though each group appears primarily focused on local aims.[85] In 2021, IS-WA militants killed Boko Haram's leader, prompting thousands of people, including ex-Boko Haram fighters, their families, and civilians fleeing Boko Haram-held zones, to surrender to authorities. A number of Boko Haram commanders reportedly joined IS-WA, while one remnant Boko Haram faction remains active around Lake Chad.[86] Other former Boko Haram fighters reportedly have relocated to join criminal gangs or emergent extremist cells based in northwest and north-central Nigeria (see "Rural Insecurity: Herder-Farmer Conflict and "Banditry" below).

Since a wave of casualties in 2018, the Nigerian military has clustered in urban "super camps," effectively ceding control of rural zones and limiting humanitarian access and civilian protection

[80] A separate CRS product, CRS In Focus IF10173, *Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province*, provides more information on this conflict.

[81] Council on Foreign Relations, "Nigeria Security Tracker," accessed November 29, 2021.

[82] UNICEF, "UNICEF calls for end to recruitment and use of child soldiers," February 14, 2022.

[83] AI, *"We Dried Our Tears."*

[84] U.N. Security Council, *Twenty-ninth report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team submitted pursuant to resolution 2368 (2017) concerning ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals and entities*, U.N. doc. S/2022/83, February 3, 2022.

[85] Ibid.

[86] Obi Anyadike, "Why Boko Haram fighters are surrendering," *The New Humanitarian*, August 12, 2021.

beyond key garrison towns. Military offensives and air force strikes on Boko Haram and IS-WA positions periodically claim numerous fatalities, but government forces have struggled to restore stability or maintain security in cleared zones. Regional military coordination is considered to have improved since the 2014 activation of the African Union-authorized Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), comprising troops from Nigeria, Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger, though inconsistent regional engagement and low interoperability, among other challenges, are viewed as having limited its effectiveness.[87]

In 2016, the Nigerian government launched Safe Corridor, a de-radicalization and reintegration program for ex-combatants. Hundreds of men and boys have participated. Analysts have raised a number of concerns related to the program, including with poor screening that has resulted in misclassification of civilians as militants, abuses against participants, and opposition by some officials and communities to the reintegration of ex-militants into society.[88] Efforts to reintegrate women and girls formerly associated with Boko Haram and IS-WA have been more limited.[89]

Nigerian security forces have reportedly committed extensive human rights abuses in the context of counterterrorism operations, including extrajudicial killings, sexual violence, enforced disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and torture.[90] Nigeria's Air Force, which has received U.S. training and equipment, has reportedly killed scores of civilians during air raids.[91] Military abuses have posed challenges for U.S. security assistance (see "Security Assistance and Cooperation").

Humanitarian Conditions in Northeast Nigeria

According to U.N. data, roughly 8.5 million people in northeast Nigeria require humanitarian assistance.[92] As of January 2022, an estimated 2.2 million people were displaced within Nigeria, and some 330,000 Nigerians were outside the country as refugees, most in Niger and Cameroon.[93] Humanitarian groups have faced severe access constraints and other operational challenges. Boko Haram and IS-WA have kidnapped and killed humanitarian workers and destroyed aid facilities. Nigeria's military has restricted humanitarian access beyond garrison towns based on domestic laws proscribing engagement with terrorist entities without exception for humanitarian activities. The military has repeatedly accused international humanitarian agencies of supporting terrorists and at times has suspended their operations. Observers also contend that the laws and processes governing humanitarian delivery are onerous and prone to delays.[94]

[87] ICG, *What Role for the Multinational Joint Task Force in Fighting Boko Haram?*, 2020.

[88] ICG, *An Exit from Boko Haram? Assessing Nigeria's Operation Safe Corridor*, 2021.

[89] ICG, *Returning from the Land of Jihad: The Fate of Women Associated with Boko Haram*, 2019.

[90] See, among others, AI, *Stars on Their Shoulders. Blood on their Hands. War Crimes Committed by the Nigerian Military*, 2015; AI, *"They betrayed us": Women who survived Boko Haram raped, starved and detained in Nigeria*, 2018; HRW, *They Didn't Know if I was Alive or Dead*, 2019; AI, *"We Dried Our Tears."*

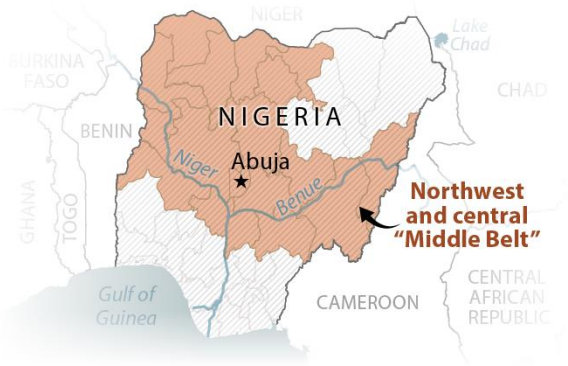
[91] Chinedu Asadu, "Nigerian air force probes reports it killed civilians," Associated Press (AP), September 16, 2021.

[92] U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), "Lake Chad Basin Humanitarian Snapshot as of 17 January 2022," January 17, 2022.

[93] U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Nigeria: All Population Snapshot," January 2022.

[94] Jacob Kurtzer, *Out of Sight: Northeast Nigeria's Humanitarian Crisis*, CSIS, 2020.

Rural Insecurity: Herder-Farmer Conflict and "Banditry"



Rural violence has surged in Nigeria over the past decade, especially in the northwest and central "Middle Belt" regions (see map).[95] The insecurity has defied simple classification. Observers attribute heightening insecurity in part to a rise in conflicts between farmers and herders over resource access and related issues (e.g., crop damage caused by livestock). Such conflicts have intensified in recent years as various socioeconomic, political, and ecological trends have reduced the compatibility of pastoral and farming livelihoods and raised the stakes of competitions for resource access and control.[96]

As such conflicts have intensified, analysts have observed an "erosion of the social and economic fabric that binds together farmers and pastoralists," and rising tensions and violence along ethnic lines.[97] In the northwest, herder-farmer clashes typically pit ethnic Fulani herders against ethnic Hausa farmers, two predominately-Muslim groups. In the Middle Belt, as noted above, much of the violence has involved Fulani herders and Christian farmers of various ethnic groups. Hate speech has proliferated, with analysts expressing particular concern over rhetoric that attributes unified, often nefarious aims to the Fulani—a diverse and expansive ethnic group that lives across much of Central and West Africa (see **Text Box**).

Fulani Pastoralists in Nigeria

The Fulani are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, spanning much of Central and West Africa. In general, Fulani are prominent in cattle rearing—though not all Fulani practice pastoralism, and there is wide variation in Fulani living patterns (e.g., urban or rural, nomadic or settled). As violence involving Fulanis has escalated in Nigeria, some commentators have portrayed the violence as a coordinated effort to "Fulanize" or "Islamize" the country, echoing longstanding complaints among Christian communities in the Middle Belt about perceived domination by Hausa-Fulani Muslims.[98] The prominence of Fulanis in Nigeria's armed forces, which partly reflects patterns of colonial administration, has stoked such perceptions. That President Muhammadu Buhari is a Fulani Muslim livestock owner has fueled accusations of his support for attacks by Fulani pastoralists.[99]

Many analysts object to characterizations of Nigeria's Fulani as internally homogeneous and narratives attributing herder-farmer violence to a coordinated religious or ideological agenda on the part of Fulani pastoralists.[100] Local

[95] The Middle Belt is an unofficial, variously defined region; there is debate over which states it includes. This map is not intended to authoritatively demarcate the Middle Belt. In some cases, definitions of the Middle Belt typically only include part of a state's territory (e.g., southern Kaduna generally is included, while northern Kaduna is not). The CRS graphic above is based on descriptions in Moses E. Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy: Hausa Imperial Agents and Middle Belt Consciousness in Nigeria* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014) and ACAPS, "Nigeria," among others.

[96] On these trends, see Leif Brottem and Andrew McDonnell, *Pastoralism and Conflict*; ICG, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*, 2017; Adam Higazi and Zahbia Yousuf, *From Cooperation to Contention: Political Unsettlement and Farmer-Pastoralist Conflicts in Nigeria,* Conciliation Resources, 2017.

[97] Leif Brottem and Andrew McDonnell, *Pastoralism and Conflict*.

[98] Michael Nwankpa, "The North-South Divide: Nigerian Discourses on Boko Haram, the Fulani, and Islamization," Hudson Institute, 2021. For background on tensions in the Middle Belt, see Moses E. Ochonu, *Colonialism by Proxy*.

[99] ICG, *Herders against Farmers: Nigeria's Expanding Deadly Conflict*, September 2017.

[100] See, e.g., Leif Brottem, "The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa," Africa Center for Strategic Studies, July 12, 2021; Adam Higazi and Zahbia Yousuf, *From Cooperation to Contention*.

peace advocates, both Christian and Muslim, have warned that such discourses may stoke intercommunal tensions and further complicate attempts at resolution.[101] In this regard, such narratives reportedly have provoked reprisal killings targeting innocent Fulani, and the misattribution of attacks to Fulani herders.[102] Such trends may, in turn, incite Fulani support for, or participation in, armed violence under the banner of protecting fellow Fulani.[103]

Mounting herder-farmer violence has provided a pretext for a broader escalation of insecurity in the north and Middle Belt. Ethnic militias have mobilized, and lines between conflict drivers have blurred as violence has grown to encompass resource disputes between herders and farmers, gang-style violence by rival ethnic militia, and opportunistic criminality. In some zones of the northwest, gangs exert territorial control, taxing local populations and, in some cases, providing rudimentary services (e.g., law enforcement).[104]

Domestic media have often referred to the armed groups as "bandit" gangs; reporters and state authorities have increasingly referred to them as "insurgents" or "terrorists" as attacks have escalated. Attacks on villages in the northwest and Middle Belt have periodically claimed dozens of fatalities. In 2020-2021, attackers abducted hundreds of children in a series of high-profile mass kidnappings targeting schools, collecting millions of dollars in ransom and attracting international attention. Gangs also have kidnapped and killed local politicians and security personnel; in August 2021, attackers raided a defense academy and downed a military jet.[105]

In this context, analysts and U.S. officials have expressed concern over the prospects for Islamist extremists to gain a foothold beyond Nigeria's northeast.[106] Alarm has escalated as Ansaru—an Al Qaeda-affiliated Boko Haram splinter faction and U.S.-designated FTO that appeared dormant as of 2015—has apparently reactivated in Nigeria's north-central region, and as former Boko Haram members have relocated to the northwest.[107] Researchers assert that cooperation between "bandits" and extremists remains limited, while noting that some gangs have at times recruited or collaborated with Islamist extremists.[108] Most "bandit" gangs appear not to espouse a political or religious ideology, though some have mobilized under the banner of protecting Fulani.[109]

The Buhari administration has expanded military operations in the northwest and Middle Belt, primarily involving Air Force strikes targeting gang encampments, with little discernible strategy to reassert state presence in cleared zones. Meanwhile, attempts to resolve herder-farmer disputes have faced challenges, as a plan to establish grazing reserves to address resource access disputes has been slow to progress amid political opposition and resistance from farmers and herders.[110]

[101] Abdulaziz Abdulaziz, "Kukah warns against 'anti-Fulani' campaign," *Premium Times*, July 16, 2019.

[102] State Department, *2020 Report on International Religious Freedom.*

[103] Africa Center for Strategic Studies, "Criminal Gangs Destabilizing Nigeria's North West," December 14, 2021.

[104] James Barnett, "The Bandit Warlords of Nigeria," *New Lines Magazine*, December 1, 2021.

[105] Joe Parkinson and Drew Hinshaw, "Nigeria's Gangs Raised Millions by Kidnapping Children. Now the Government Can't Stop Them." *Wall Street Journal*, October 17, 2021.

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

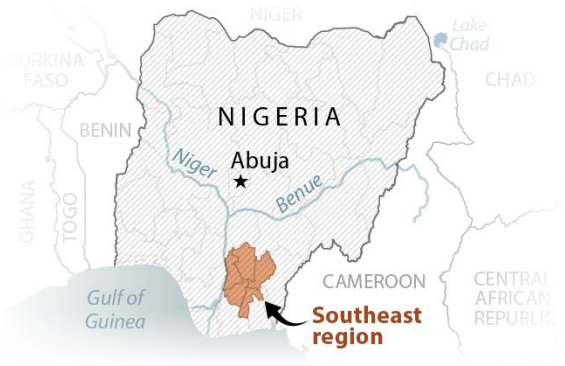
[107] Jacob Zenn and Caleb Weiss, "Ansaru Resurgent," in *Perspectives on Terrorism* vol. 15, no. 5 (2021).

[108] James Barnett, Murtala Ahmed Rufa'i, and Abdulaziz Abdulaziz, "Northwestern Nigeria: A Jihadization of Banditry, or a "Banditization" of Jihad?" *Combating Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC) Sentinel*, January 2022.

[109] James Barnett, "The Bandit Warlords of Nigeria"; James Barnett and Murtala Rufai, "The Other Insurgency: Northwest Nigeria's Worsening Bandit Crisis," *War on the Rocks*, November 16, 2021.

[110] ICG, *Ending Nigeria's Herder-Farmer Crisis: The Livestock Reform Plan*, 2021.

Separatism in the Southeast



In 2020-2021, Nigeria's southeast saw a wave of violence between the Nigerian government and an emergent armed secessionist movement. Known as the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), the separatists profess an aim to restore the would-be breakaway state of Biafra, which sought to secede from Nigeria in 1967, precipitating the devastating 1967-1970 Nigerian Civil War.[111]

IPOB was founded in 2012 by Nnamdi Kanu, a dual Nigerian-British citizen. It soon gained supporters primarily through the transmission of pro-secession radio broadcasts from its London-based media operation.[112] Nigerian authorities arrested Kanu in 2015 for treason and other crimes, and reportedly killed at least 150 peaceful pro-Biafra protesters in the ensuing months.[113] Kanu secured bail on medical grounds in 2017, and later jumped bail and fled to the United Kingdom and continued his broadcasts. IPOB messaging has sought to leverage historic perceptions of marginalization among the Igbo—Nigeria's third-largest ethnic group, which led the original push for an independent Biafra—as well as newer grievances, such as disputes between Muslim herders and Christian farmers. (The Igbo are predominately Christian, and Igbo activists have long protested their perceived domination by the northern Hausa-Fulani and other ethnic groups.)

Violence escalated in mid-2020, as government forces conducted raids on IPOB meetings and arrested alleged IPOB sympathizers. IPOB later launched an armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), and in early 2021, suspected ESN militants began attacking state security forces, killing dozens. Amnesty International asserts that government forces killed at least 115 people in security operations in the South East between January and June 2021 and accused security forces of "sweeping mass arrests, excessive and unlawful force, and torture and other ill-treatment."[114] In June 2021, Kanu was re-arrested—allegedly in Kenya, though the circumstances of his arrest are unclear. He was repatriated to Nigeria, where he is in detention pending trial for terrorism and other charges. ESN attacks have declined since Kanu's arrest, though violence has continued in the southeast, including killings of security personnel and brutal enforcement of weekly "sit-at-home" directives, during which criminals prohibit residents from leaving their homes.[115]

[111] For an account of the war, see John de St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), reprinted as *The Brothers' War: Biafra and Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber, 2009).

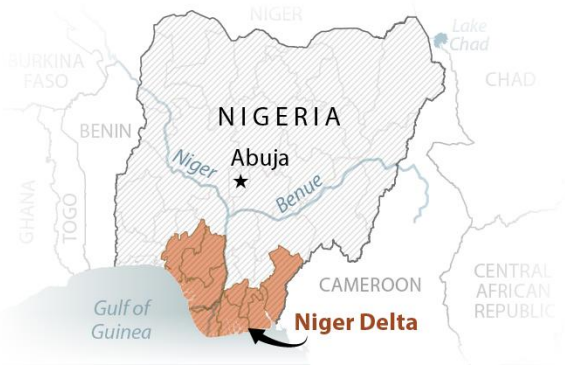
[112] AI, N*igeria: 'Bullets were raining everywhere': Deadly repression of pro-Biafra activists*, 2016.

[113] Ibid.

[114] AI, "Nigeria: At least 115 people killed by security forces in four months in country's Southeast," August 5, 2021.

[115] Ebuka Onyeji, "Special Report: Inside Nigeria's bloody war with IPOB where innocent citizens pay heavy price," *Premium Times*, March 22, 2022; SBM Intel, *Perception and Impact of IPOB-Ordered Sit-at-Home Protests*, 2021;

Insecurity in the Niger Delta and Gulf of Guinea[116]



Nigeria's Niger Delta (see map), an oil-rich region in southern Nigeria that borders the Gulf of Guinea, has long been a site of political unrest, criminality, and intermittent armed militancy linked to local grievances over perceived neglect, exploitation, and environmental devastation by oil operators.[117] Militant violence peaked in the 2000s, with regular attacks oil facilities and personnel. In 2009, the government announced an amnesty and introduced a monthly stipend for former Niger Delta militants. The program largely halted attacks on oil facilities, but analysts contend it has failed to address root causes of insecurity—especially the perceived exploitation of local resources without adequate consultation and compensation—and facilitate militants' reintegration into productive civilian life.[118] Threats and attacks on the oil sector intermittently resurge: in 2016, for instance, renewed attacks on oil facilities pushed oil production to a 30-year low.

The Niger Delta faces an array of additional security challenges. These include gang violence by secretive syndicates commonly known as "cults" or "confraternities,"[119] intercommunal clashes, and violence related to political rivalries. The waters offshore of the Niger Delta are among the world's most dangerous for attacks on vessels; abducted crewmembers can be harbored for days or weeks within the Niger Delta's network of creeks and mangrove forests pending ransom, while cargo stolen at sea is resold in a robust onshore black market. Oil theft, known as "bunkering," from oil pipelines for artisanal refinement and black-market sale is a key challenge that reportedly involves criminal networks, politicians, state security personnel, and oil workers.[120]

Trafficking in Persons and Narcotics Trafficking

Trafficking in Persons. Nigeria is a source, transit point, and destination for human trafficking. In its Trafficking in Persons report for 2021, the State Department ranked Nigeria on Tier 2, meaning it does not fully meet standards for eliminating trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. This represented an upgrade from 2020, when Nigeria ranked on the Tier 2 Watch List; the State Department attributed the improvement to "overall increasing efforts" to curb trafficking.[121] Trafficking cases at times make global headlines, such as occasional discoveries of "baby factories," a reportedly widespread practice in which women are held against their will, raped, and forced to deliver babies to be sold for illicit adoption. Edo State, in the southwest, is a hub for international sex and labor trafficking to Europe, particularly Italy, typically via Libya.[122]

[116] A separate CRS product, CRS In Focus IF11117, *Gulf of Guinea: Recent Trends in Piracy and Armed Robbery*, provides more detail on maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea.

[117] For a historical overview, see ICG, *Fuelling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 2006.

[118] See, e.g., Nextier SPD, *Assessment of the Presidential Amnesty Program (PAP)*, 2020.

[119] BBC, "The ultra-violent cult that became a global mafia," December 13, 2021.

[120] Christina Katsouris and Aaron Sayne, *Nigeria's Criminal Crude: International Options to Combat the Export of Stolen Oil*, Chatham House, 2013; TI, *Military Involvement in Oil Theft in the Niger Delta: A Discussion Paper*, 2019.

[121] State Department, *2021 Trafficking in Persons Report: Nigeria*, 2021.

[122] HRW, *"You Pray for Death": Trafficking of Women and Girls in Nigeria*, 2019.

Narcotics Trafficking. Narcotics trafficking is another key challenge, and a longstanding focus of U.S. law enforcement assistance. Nigeria is a source, transit point, and destination market for drug trafficking, including of illicit recreational drugs (e.g., cocaine and heroin) as well as real and counterfeit opioids and other pharmaceuticals (e.g., tramadol, codeine, and anti-malarials).[123]

Cybercrime, Financial Crime, and U.S. Responses

Cybercrime in Nigeria has been a focus of U.S. law enforcement assistance and justice sector actions. Nigeria is a global hub for cybercriminal activity, including "419 scams"—advance-fee fraud nicknamed for the article in Nigeria's penal code that outlaws fraudulent e-mails—as well as business email compromise (BEC) attacks and identity theft. Nigerians also are prominent in "romance scams," in which conspirators defraud victims via fake online romantic relationships.

U.S. and Nigerian authorities have collaborated to crack down on cybercrime, and coordinated U.S.-Nigerian law enforcement operations have led to hundreds of arrests. U.S. authorities have brought charges against a number of Nigerian nationals for internet fraud and money laundering. In a prominent case, U.S. authorities charged social media influencer Ramon Olorunwa Abbas (alias "Ray Hushpuppi") with conspiring to engage in money laundering; DOJ also mentioned Abbas as a co-conspirator in a scheme to launder money for North Korean cybercriminals.[124] In 2021, Abbas pled guilty and provided information that led to the indictment of six other individuals, including a decorated police official, Deputy Police Commissioner Abba Kyari.[125] U.S. authorities are reportedly seeking Kyari's extradition to the United States.[126]

In 2020, the Treasury Department imposed sanctions on six Nigerian nationals for email and romance scams under Executive Order 13694 (as amended), pertaining to cybercrime.[127]

Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) and U.S. Assistance

As of March 24, 2022, Nigeria had reported approximately 255,000 COVID-19 infections, with 3,100 deaths.[128] Several surveys assessing the presence of COVID-19 antibodies—an indicator of past infection—appear to indicate that official statistics significantly underreport Nigeria's caseload.[129] Nigeria's rate of testing has been low compared to many countries in the region.[130] Vaccination efforts have been slow due to in part to limited financial resources for COVID-19 vaccine procurement and global supply chain constraints. Nigeria has destroyed over one million

[123] U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *At the Crossroads of Licit and Illicit: Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa*, 2021.

[124] DOJ, "Nigerian National Brought to U.S. to Face Charges of Conspiring to Launder Hundreds of Millions of Dollars from Cybercrime Schemes," July 3, 2020; DOJ, "Three North Korean Military Hackers Indicted in Wide-Ranging Scheme to Commit Cyberattacks and Financial Crimes Across the Globe," February 17, 2021.

[125] DOJ, "Six Indicted in International Scheme to Defraud Qatari School Founder and then Launder over $1 Million in Illicit Proceeds," July 28, 2021.

[126] *This Day*, "Nigeria: Court to Hear Govt's Extradition Suit Against Abba Kyari March 23," March 10, 2022.

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

[128] World Health Organization (WHO), "Nigeria: WHO COVID-19 Dashboard," accessed March 24, 2022.

[129] A survey led by the Nigeria Center for Disease Control (NCDC) and Nigerian Institute for Medical Research (NIMR) found that as of late 2020, as many as 1 in 5 people in Lagos (home to an estimated 15-20 million people) may have been infected with COVID-19 at some point. NCDC, "NCDC and NIMR Release Findings of COVID-19 Household Seroprevalence Surveys in Four States of Nigeria," February 22, 2021.

[130] OECD, "Tackling the Coronavirus (COVID-19): West African perspectives," accessed March 2, 2022.

expired vaccine doses; Nigerian officials have accused donor countries of hoarding vaccines and delivering them shortly before their expiration.[131] As of late March 2022, Nigeria had vaccinated roughly 4% of its population.[132] Vaccine hesitancy is reportedly high in some areas.[133] Vaccine hesitancy has impeded other immunization campaigns in Nigeria, including efforts to eradicate polio; Nigeria was declared free of wild polio in 2020, though vaccine-derived polio remains a challenge. Researchers have partly attributed vaccine hesitancy in Nigeria to public distrust in the wake of a 1996 trial of an experimental meningitis treatment by U.S. pharmaceutical company Pfizer, during which several participants died and many others became disabled.[134]

As of mid-January 2022, the State Department reported that the United States, in partnership with COVAX and the African Union, had donated 18.3 million vaccine doses to Nigeria.[135] As of late 2021, USAID had obligated $90.2 million to support Nigeria's COVID-19 response.[136] U.S. foreign aid has included delivery of a field hospital, 200 ventilators, and protective equipment, as well as the training of volunteers and religious leaders to share COVID-19-related information.[137]

The Economy

Nigeria's economy is the largest in Africa. Its energy sector, discussed below, has long been a key source of government revenues, and dependence on oil has significantly shaped Nigeria's politics and economy since large-scale production began in the 1970s. The non-oil economy is large and dynamic, driven by a youthful, rapidly growing population and burgeoning services sector. Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, is among the world's largest cities and is a technology and financial services hub in Africa; its population and annual gross domestic product (GDP) are larger than those of many African countries. Nigerian artists and musicians are prominent in global media, and the country's film industry, "Nollywood," is second to India's Bollywood in annual output.[138] Investors have increasingly viewed Nigeria as a potentially lucrative consumer market for social media and other telecommunications, financial services, retail trade, and other industries.[139]

Nonetheless, Nigeria faces stark economic and development challenges, and a wide gap between the rich and the poor. The World Bank has projected that 100 million Nigerians may be living in extreme poverty by 2022—making Nigeria home to one of the largest extremely poor populations in the world.[140] Service provision is limited in densely populated urban zones and in rural areas; as of 2015, 30% of Nigerians lacked access to improved water, and 70% lacked access to basic

[131] AP, "Nigeria Destroys 1 Million Nearly Expired COVID Vaccine Doses," December 22, 2021.

[132] WHO, "Nigeria: WHO COVID-19 Dashboard."

[133] Iliyasu et al., "'They have produced a vaccine, but we doubt if COVID-19 exists': correlates of COVID-19 vaccine acceptability among adults in Kano, Nigeria," *Human Vaccines & Immunotherapeutics* vol. 17, no. 11, 2021.

[134] Pfizer denied wrongdoing, and maintained that the trial met ethical standards. A lawsuit brought by the Kano State government led to an out of court settlement in 2009. See Belinda Archibong and Francis Annan, "What do Pfizer's 1996 drug trials in Nigeria teach us about vaccine hesitancy?," Brookings, December 3, 2021.

[135] State Department, "COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution: Nigeria," accessed January 12, 2022. See also CRS In Focus IF11796, *Global COVID-19 Vaccine Distribution*, by Sara M. Tharakan and Tiaji Salaam-Blyther, and CRS In Focus IF11532, *Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19): Impact in Africa*, coordinated by Alexis Arieff.

[136] USAID, "COVID-19 – Sub-Saharan Africa (Fact Sheet #2, FY2021)," October 2021.

[137] State Department, "The United States and Nigeria: Strategic Partners," November 18, 2021.

[138] UNESCO, *The African film Industry: trends, challenges and opportunities for growth*, 2021.

[139] On challenges and opportunities for investors in Nigeria, see *Financial Times*, "Special Report: Investing in Nigeria" (February 14, 2022) a collection of articles available at https://www.ft.com/reports/investing-in-nigeria.

[140] Jonathan Lain and Tara Vishwanath, "Tackling poverty in multiple dimensions: A proving ground in Nigeria?"

sanitation facilities.[141] Nigeria tops the World Bank's list of countries with the largest populations lacking access to electricity, with an estimated 90 million people as of 2019; the gap has widened in recent years, as population growth has outstripped electrification efforts.[142] Despite notable advancements in public healthcare provision, immense challenges remain: Nigeria accounts for over a quarter of annual malaria deaths and one of the top tuberculosis disease burdens globally, and is home to the world's third-largest population living with HIV.

A drop in global oil prices in 2020 and COVID-19-related shocks weakened Nigeria's economy, which was already mired in a period of low growth following a 2016 recession. The country's GDP contracted by 1.8% in 2020, according to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which estimated a rebound to 2.6% growth in 2021.[143] Russia's invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 has roiled global fuel and food markets, with evolving implications for Nigeria, which imports wheat and other products from Russia.[144] Observers question whether Nigeria can fully capitalize on a spike in crude oil and natural gas prices, as the country's reliance on imported fuel (a function of insufficient domestic refining capacity) and the government's subsidization of gasoline (despite efforts to remove the subsidy, see below) are expected to undercut projected revenue gains.[145]

Nigeria's public debt stock has grown rapidly in recent years. As of late 2021, the World Bank assessed Nigeria's debt to be sustainable, but highly vulnerable to fiscal shocks, such as oil price and production swings.[146] Longstanding subsidies on fuel have imposed a high fiscal burden; the Buhari administration has pledged to replace the subsidy with cash transfers in 2022, but has postponed implementation. Interest payments are high as a share of government revenues: Nigeria has struggled to collect taxes outside of the oil and gas sector, and has one of the world's lowest government revenue-to-GDP ratios.[147] Fiscal pressures at the federal level tend to ricochet to sub-federal tiers via reduced intergovernmental revenue transfers. As of late 2021, around half of Nigeria's external debt was owed to multinational lenders, primarily the World Bank and the IMF; Eurobonds accounted for much of the balance.[148] China is Nigeria's largest bilateral lender.

China's Commercial Involvement in Nigeria

China is Nigeria's top source of imports, and one of its top export destinations. Chinese construction firms have undertaken a number of public works and infrastructure projects in the country, many financed in whole or in part by China's state Ex-Im Bank.[149] Recently finished or ongoing projects include several new railways and highways;[150] new airport terminals; a deep-water port expected to be completed by 2023; and the 700-megawatt Zungeru Hydroelectric Power Project, slated to begin operation in 2022. Other projects have faced delays amid reported

[141] World Bank, *Nigeria Biannual Economic Update: Water Supply, Sanitation & Hygiene—a Wake-up Call*, 2019.

[142] World Bank, *Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2021*, 2021.

[143] IMF, World Economic Outlook database, October 2021 update.

[144] Femi Ibirogba, "Wheat: Dealing with shortages as Russia/Ukraine conflict raises cost," *The Guardian (Nigeria)*, March 18, 2022.

[145] Abdulkareem Mojeed and Mary Izuaka, "What's in store for Nigerians as oil prices surge? Experts speak," *Premium Times*, March 8, 2022.

[146] World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update (November 2021): Time for Business Unusual*, 2021.

[147] OECD, *Revenue Statistics in Africa*, 2021.

[148] Nigerian Debt Management Office, "Nigeria's External Debt Stock as at December 31, 2021," available at https://www.dmo.gov.ng/debt-profile/external-debts/external-debt-stock.

[149] For an overview of available information on Chinese investment and construction activities in Nigeria, see the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS)-China Africa Research Initiative (CARI) databases and American Enterprise Institute (AEI)'s China Global Investment Tracker.

[150] On Chinese railway projects in Nigeria, see Yunnan Chen, *China's Role in Nigerian Railway Development and Implications for Security and Development*, U.S. Institute of Peace, 2018.

contract disputes or financing issues, including construction of a new airport terminal at Lagos's airport and of the 3,050-megawatt Mambilla Hydropower Project, expected to be one of the largest hydroelectric plants in Africa.[151] Nigeria has been a leading regional recipient of Chinese foreign direct investment (FDI), and hosts two special economic zones partly financed by Chinese authorities and/or state enterprises that offer incentives to Chinese manufacturing firms.[152] China also has provided financing to support expansions of Nigeria's information and communication technology infrastructure; Chinese technology firm Huawei has been involved in these efforts.[153]

Some commentators have criticized the alleged opacity of Chinese loans to Nigeria, and raised concerns over potential threats to Nigeria's sovereignty arising from indebtedness to China.[154] The Buhari administration has downplayed such concerns and defended Chinese lending as favorable to Nigeria and beneficial for the country's economy.[155] Researchers also have raised concerns related to illicit activity by Chinese commercial actors in Nigeria, such as bribery, illegal logging, and illicit fishing.[156] (Non-Chinese nationals also have been implicated in such practices.) In the past two decades, China has become a top supplier of military equipment to Nigeria; recent Nigerian acquisitions include tanks, armored vehicles, aircraft, drone systems, and artillery.

Impediments to Growth and Development

Numerous analyses have sought to identify impediments to the realization of Nigeria's economic potential and explain the apparent contradiction between the country's vast human and natural resources and its poor development indicators. Many of these have focused on dysfunctions and structural distortions arising from Nigeria's dependence on oil and gas, such as vulnerability to oil price swings and boom-and-bust cycles. Others have focused on constraints to efficient oil sector management in a political system in which officials at all levels of government face pressures to capture and distribute oil wealth.[157]

Efforts to spur nonoil industries via import restrictions, foreign exchange controls, and other protectionist policies have had limited success, some argue, in engendering diversification.[158] Corruption is a key barrier to private sector activity, as is costly and unreliable power access. The Central Bank maintains several windows through which foreign exchange is sold at differing rates based on the client, and prohibits the use of foreign exchange channels to import dozens of goods; businesses report that such controls create uncertainty and restrict access to imports.[159] According to the State Department, other concerns include "an inconsistent regulatory and legal environment, insecurity, a slow and ineffective bureaucracy and judicial system, and inadequate intellectual property rights protections."[160]

[151] Wole Oyebade, "Lagos Airport awaits Chinese terminal two years after delivery date," *The Guardian (Nigeria)*, December 10, 2021; Taiwo Adebulu, "Hope for Mambilla project as Sunrise Power waives $500m penalty for Nigeria," *The Cable*, November 18, 2021.

[152] Yunnan Chen, *"Africa's China": Chinese Manufacturing Investments in Nigeria in the Post-Oil Boom Era and Channels for Technology Transfer*, SAIS-CARI, 2020.

[153] Nils Hungerland and Kenddrick Chan, *Assessing China's Digital Silk Road: Huawei's Engagement in Nigeria*, LSE Ideas, 2021.

[154] See, e.g., *The Guardian (Nigeria)*, "Chinese loan and Nigeria's sovereignty," August 11, 2020.

[155] Debt Management Office, "Facts About Chinese Loans to Nigeria," June 18, 2020.

[156] Matthew T. Page, *The Intersection of China's Commercial Interests and Nigeria's Conflict Landscape*, 2018.

[157] On constraints to efficient policymaking in Nigeria, see Zainab Usman, "The 'Resource Curse' and the Constraints on Reforming Nigeria's Oil Sector," in Levan and Ukata, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Nigerian Politics*, 520-544.

[158] International Monetary Fund (IMF), *Nigeria: Selected Issues: Diversification of the Nigerian Economy*, 2021.

[159] State Department, *2021 Investment Climate Statements: Nigeria*, 2021.

[160] State Department, *2020 Investment Climate Statements: Nigeria*, 2020.

Quality job creation has been a key challenge. An estimated 33% of Nigeria's labor force—and 43% among those aged 15-31—was unemployed as of late 2020, one of the highest official unemployment rates in the world, according to official statistics.[161] Many Nigerians are engaged in poorly paying informal work such as low-yield subsistence agriculture or self-employment in services like petty trading and tailoring. Labor strikes are common in the formal sector, including by public sector employees protesting nonpayment of salaries. Barriers to quality employment and other labor challenges are generally more pronounced among women (see **Text Box**).

Nigerian Women in the Workplace: Selected Issues

Across various measures—including employment rates, education and school attendance, digital literacy, financial inclusion, and access to agricultural inputs—women in Nigeria generally lag behind men.[162] The State Department reports that Nigerian women experience "considerable economic discrimination," noting that Nigerian law "does not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value [...or] nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring."[163] Women often are barred from owning or inheriting land due to customary social practices. According to a recent survey, nearly three in five women workers, across various sectors, reported that they had experienced gender-based violence or harassment (GBVH) in the workplace; nearly one-third reported that they had faced pressure for sexual favors at work.[164] Women's participation in political leadership and governance is another key challenge; Nigeria has one of the world's lowest rates of women's representation in parliament.

The agriculture sector is central to Nigeria's economy, and has been a focus of U.S. development assistance (see "U.S. Assistance"). It is the country's top employer and contributes roughly one-quarter of annual GDP. Top export crops include sesame seeds, cashew nuts, and cocoa beans. Nigeria's livestock industry is one of the largest in Africa and is expected to expand as rising incomes, population growth, and urbanization drive up demand for animal products.[165] Analysts contend Nigeria's agriculture sector operates below potential, due to such issues as low fertilizer use (Nigeria has one of the world's lowest fertilizer usage rates), limited uptake of improved seeds, irrigation, and other technologies, poor access to credit, and high market access costs.[166]

Several analyses have assessed Nigeria to be particularly vulnerable to negative effects of climate change.[167] Northern Nigeria is chronically arid, and susceptible to highly variable rainfall, leading to drought and riverine flooding; the Middle Belt also faces exposure to aridity and flooding, with implications for herder-farmer violence and other land-use conflicts in the region.[168] Storm surges and riverine flooding pose key risks in southern Nigeria, particularly in densely populated coastal cities, including Lagos, that generally lack adequate drainage systems and other infrastructure.[169]

[161] NBS, *Labor Force Statistics: Unemployment and Underemployment Report (Q4 2020)*, 2021.

[162] See NBS, *Labor Force Statistics;* and NBS, *National Youth Survey 2020*, 2021.

[163] State Department, *2020 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.*

[164] Nigeria Labor Congress and Solidarity Center, *Breaking the Silence: Gender-Based Violence in Nigeria's World of Work*, 2021.

[165] Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), *Transforming Livestock Sector: Nigeria*, 2019.

[166] Dayo Phillip et al., *Constraints to Increasing Agricultural Productivity in Nigeria*, International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) Brief, 2009; Bedru Balana and Motunrayo Oyeyemi, *Credit Constraints and Agricultural Technology Adoption: Evidence from Nigeria*, IFPRI Working Paper, 2020.

[167] For instance, Nigeria ranked as the second most vulnerable country (tied with Chad) on UNICEF's 2021 Children's Climate Risk Index, a measure of children's vulnerability to environmental stress and extreme weather events (see UNICEF, *Children's Climate Risk Index*, 2021). Verisk Maplecroft, a risk consultancy, has identified Lagos as one of ten cities at "extreme risk" of economic exposure to climate change (Verisk Maplecroft, "84% of world's fastest growing cities face 'extreme' climate change risks," November 21, 2018).

[168] USAID, *Fragility and Climate Risks in Nigeria*, 2018.

[169] Adaku Jane Echendu, "Nigeria has a flooding challenge: here's why and what can be done," *The Conversation*,

The Oil and Gas Sector

Nigeria has the 11th-largest proven crude oil reserves in the world; in 2020, it was the 12th largest producer of crude oil and condensate and 16th largest producer of natural gas.[170] Oil and gas exports generally account for at least half of annual federally collected revenues.[171] As noted above, domestic refining remains limited, despite efforts to increase use of existing refineries and expand total capacity; Nigeria relies on imports for a large share of its fuel needs.

U.S firms Chevron and ExxonMobil are among the largest multinational oil companies (MOCs) active in Nigeria's oil sector; others include the Anglo-Dutch firm Shell (the leading MOC in Nigeria), French firm Total, and Italian firm Eni. Analysts have raised concerns over opacity, corruption, and mismanagement on the part of the oil parastatal, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).[172] In 2021, President Buhari ratified the Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB), an expansive law to overhaul governance of the oil industry.

Nigeria's crude oil production declined in 2020-2021 as the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), to which Nigeria belongs, responded to a global oil price crash by restricting members' output. Maintenance issues and underinvestment have limited Nigeria's output to below its allotted OPEC quota levels.[173] MOCs in Nigeria have increasingly sought to divest from onshore operations, a pattern observers attribute to rising costs associated with aging pipelines and insecurity; tensions with local communities, some of which have sought reparations for oil pollution; and global pressure to transition to clean energy sources; among other factors.[174]

U.S.-Nigeria Trade and Investment

Nigeria is the United States' second-largest trade partner and the third-largest destination of U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) in sub-Saharan Africa. Nigerian exports to the United States have long been dominated by crude oil, which accounted for 75% of U.S. imports from Nigeria, by value, in 2020.[175] Nigeria often ranks as a top source of U.S. imports under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, P.L. 106-200, as amended) trade preference program; crude oil accounts for nearly all of Nigeria's AGOA-eligible exports. U.S. crude imports from Nigeria have been subject to dramatic swings due to fluctuations in global oil market trends. Amid rising U.S. domestic oil production, U.S. imports of crude oil from Nigeria have fallen sharply since the 2000s and early 2010s, when Nigeria often ranked in the top five suppliers of U.S. crude imports. The largest categories of U.S. exports to Nigeria in 2020, by value, were automobiles, machinery, cereals, and mineral fuels.[176] U.S. FDI is in Nigeria is led by the oil and gas sector, though the share of extractives in the U.S. FDI position in Nigeria has declined in recent years amid U.S. investment in other sectors, such as services.[177]

October 25, 2021.

[170] BP, *Statistical Review of World Energy: 70th Edition*, 2021.

[171] Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), *Economic Report: First Half of 2020*, 2021, and monthly economic reports.

[172] Aaron Sayne et al., *Inside NNPC Oil Sales: A Case for Reform in Nigeria*, Natural Resource Governance Institute, 2015; IMF, *Nigeria: Selected Issues*, IMF Country Report No. 19/93, 2019.

[173] Libby George, "As OPEC reopens the taps, African giants losing race to pump more," Reuters, September 27, 2021.

[174] Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), *Divesting from the Delta: Implications for the Niger Delta as International Oil Companies Exit Onshore Production*, 2021.

[175] U.S. International Trade Commission (USITC) Dataweb, accessed December 23, 2021.

[176] USITC Dataweb, accessed December 23, 2021.

[177] Bureau of Economic Analysis, "U.S. Direct Investment Abroad: Balance of Payments and Direct Investment

U.S. Relations and Assistance

U.S.-Nigeria ties improved after Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999. Successive U.S. Administrations have described the U.S.-Nigeria relationship as among the most important U.S. partnerships in Africa. Nigerian presidents are often among the first African leaders to receive calls from new U.S. presidents. Secretaries of State under each Administration since President Clinton have visited Nigeria; President George W. Bush visited the country in 2003. Amid travel disruptions linked to COVID-19, Secretary of State Antony Blinken visited Nigeria virtually in his first official "trip" to Africa in April 2021, and in late 2021 visited the country in his first in-person trip to the region. During the latter visit, Blinken met with President Buhari and others to discuss cooperation in public health, economic growth, climate change, and security, among other issues, and signed a new foreign aid agreement with Nigeria (see "U.S. Assistance," below).[178]

Bilateral relations include the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC), a forum inaugurated in 2010 that features regular high-level diplomatic visits and discussion of a range of interests. The last BNC, held in 2020, focused on trade and investment, governance, security cooperation, and development; former Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs David Hale and Nigeria's foreign minister, Geoffrey Onyeama, led the U.S. and Nigerian delegations, respectively. A U.S.-Nigeria Commercial and Investment Dialogue (CID), launched in 2017, convenes U.S. and Nigerian officials and private sector actors to foster commercial ties, initially focused on "infrastructure, agriculture, digital economy, investment, and regulatory reform."[179] The State Department maintains an embassy in Abuja and consulate in Lagos, and supports "American Corners" in libraries throughout Nigeria to share information on U.S. culture. People-to-people ties are extensive, underpinned by a large U.S.-based Nigerian diaspora (see **Text Box**).

Nigerian Diaspora Communities in the United States

There are roughly 393,000 foreign-born Nigerians resident in the United States, according to U.S. Census Bureau data, making Nigerians the largest African-born population in the United States.[180] Top areas of residence include the Houston, New York, Dallas-Fort Worth, Atlanta, Washington, DC, and Baltimore metropolitan areas. Foreign-born Nigerians are among the best-educated diaspora groups in the United States; over 60% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, and many are employed in professional occupations such as science, medicine, and education. Remittances from the United States are a source of income for many Nigerian households.

As noted above, poor governance, human rights, and religious freedom conditions in Nigeria have strained bilateral ties. In 2020, the Trump Administration imposed visa restrictions on Nigerian nationals via Proclamation 9983, which expanded travel restrictions under Executive Order 13780 (the "Travel Ban"), citing Nigeria's failure to comply with identity-management and information-sharing issues.[181] President Biden revoked those restrictions in January 2021.

Position Data," accessed December 23, 2021; see also USITC, *U.S. Trade and Investment*.

[178] See State Department, "Secretary Blinken's Travel to Kenya, Nigeria, and Senegal," November 11, 2021; U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama at a Joint Press Availability," November 19, 2021.

[179] U.S. Embassy Abuja, "U.S. & Nigeria Agree to Commercial and Investment Dialogue," November 21, 2017.

[180] CRS tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates. CRS Analyst in Immigration Policy Jill H. Wilson assisted in collecting and analyzing U.S. Census Bureau data.

[181] White House, "Improving Enhanced Vetting Capabilities and Processes for Detecting Attempted Entry Into the United States by Terrorists or Other Public-Safety Threats," 85 FR 6699, February 5, 2020.

U.S. Assistance

Nigeria often ranks among the top annual recipients of U.S. foreign aid globally. In his late 2021 visit to Nigeria, Secretary Blinken and his Nigerian counterpart signed a five-year Development Objectives Assistance Agreement (DOAG), entailing U.S. development assistance commitments worth $2.1 billion, administered by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).[182] This would be level with what USAID reports having provided to Nigeria under a previous five-year DOAG signed in 2015.[183] Congress may consider the objectives and funding levels set out in the recently signed DOAG as it appropriates foreign aid for Nigeria in the years ahead. According to public budget materials, bilateral State Department- and USAID-administered non-emergency aid for Nigeria totaled $452.4 million in allocations of FY2020 appropriations (**Table 1**).[184]

Table 1. Non-Humanitarian U.S. Assistance for Nigeria, by Sector, FY2018-FY2022

$ thousands, allocations by year of appropriation

Sector	FY2018 (act.)	FY2019 (act.)	FY2020 (act.)	FY2021 (req.)	FY2022 (req.)
Health	408,561	585,668	403,739	436,100	538,620
Economic Growth	26,000	24,249	19,249	16,010	22,124
Education and Social Services	25,000	21,000	15,500	9,000	14,000
Democracy, Rights, and Governance	31,000	23,000	9,256	6,320	15,456
Peace and Security	7,092	4,534	4,684	4,670	4,700
Total	**497,653**	**658,451**	**452,428**	**472,100**	**594,500**

Source: State Department, *Congressional Budget Justification FY2020-FY2022*.

Notes: Figures do not include Food for Peace (FFP) assistance.

Health assistance comprised nearly 90% of this total, broadly consistent with past years. Support for Nigeria's efforts to control HIV/AIDS under the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) has long constituted the largest share of annual health assistance for Nigeria (see **Text Box**). Other U.S. global health aid for Nigeria aims to help counter malaria—Nigeria is a President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) focus country—support maternal and child health, control tuberculosis, enhance water and sanitation services, and promote nutrition, among other efforts.

PEPFAR in Nigeria: Selected Issues

Nigeria is home to one of the world's largest populations of people living with HIV, estimated at 1.7 million in 2020.[185] The country's HIV/AIDS adult prevalence rate is1.3%, lower than that of many African countries, but Nigeria has one of the highest rates of new infection in the region; an uneven distribution of cases and limited testing in a large population have raised challenges for detection and treatment. PEPFAR funding for Nigeria has exceeded $6 billion since 2003.[186] The United States has provided additional support for Nigeria's campaign

[182] U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria, "Secretary Blinken Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for $2.1 Billion Development Assistance Agreement with Nigerian VP Osinbajo and Foreign Min. Onyeama," November 19, 2021.

[183] USAID, "USAID Announces $168.5 Million in New Assistance to Nigeria Under Development Objectives Agreement," March 22, 2021.

[184] State Department, *Congressional Budget Justification (CBJ) for FY2022*, 2021.

[185] UNAIDS, "Nigeria," accessed December 27, 2021.

[186] See, e.g., U.S. Ambassador to Nigeria Mary Beth Leonard, "An Unforgettable 2021," December 23, 2021.

against HIV/AIDS via contributions to multilateral health agencies and initiatives such as the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria (Global Fund) and the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS).

Nigeria has made notable progress in its campaign against HIV/AIDS. In December 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) named Nigeria as one of nine African countries on track to reach, by 2025, UNAIDS' "95-95-95" goals, whereby 95% of all people living with HIV know their status, 95% of those diagnosed with HIV receive anti-retroviral therapy (ART), and 95% of those treated achieve viral suppression. Fostering local ownership of the HIV/AIDS response in Nigeria has been a challenge, however. In a 2021 report, PEPFAR assessed that "HIV response efforts in Nigeria continue to be almost fully dependent on international donors."[187] PEPFAR and the Global Fund accounted for 67% and 15%, respectively, of funding for the HIV/AIDS response in Nigeria in 2018; the Nigerian government accounted for 17% (most recent data).[188] USAID has struggled to increase the share of PEPFAR funding it allocates to local partners in Nigeria relative to other USAID missions in Africa.[189]

Support for agriculture-led economic growth has typically comprised the second-largest category of U.S. assistance. Nigeria is one of 12 focus countries under Feed the Future (FTF), an agricultural development initiative. U.S. democracy, human rights, and governance (DRG) aid for Nigeria has included funding to help strengthen political competition and democratic institutions (e.g., electoral bodies), support conflict prevention and resolution, and build the capacity of civil society. DRG programs also have helped strengthen local law enforcement and the justice sector.

The above figures do not include additional assistance provided through regionally and centrally managed programs, which public budget materials do not disaggregate by country. Examples include Power Africa, a USAID-led electrification effort; Prosper Africa, which aims to promote U.S.-Africa trade and investment; and humanitarian assistance (see "Humanitarian Assistance").

Security Assistance and Cooperation

According to the State Department, "since 2017, Department of State and Department of Defense security cooperation to Nigeria has totaled approximately $650 million."[190] Nigerian purchases of U.S. defense articles and services through the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program account for roughly $500 million of this total (see "U.S. Military Sales and Transfers" below). Department of Defense (DOD)-administered security assistance provided under DOD's "global train and equip" authority (10 U.S.C. 333) comprises much of the balance: such aid has included support for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities; air-to-ground integration (AGI); and maritime security and counterterrorism capacities.[191] DOD also has supported Nigeria to restore C-130 aircraft, establish a military exercise center, and develop military policies.[192]

State Department-administered security assistance has sought to strengthen counterterrorism efforts, enhance maritime security, and professionalize Nigeria's military, among other efforts. Law enforcement capacity building has been another focus of State Department programming, which is helping to establish a Transitional Police Unit to assume responsibility for civilian security in the northeast and has aided efforts to combat drug trafficking.[193] Nigeria participates in

[187] PEPFAR Nigeria, *Country Operational Plan (COP) 2021: Strategic Direction Summary*, 2021.

[188] Federal Government of Nigeria, *National Aids Spending Assessment (NASA) for the Period 2015-2018: Level and Flow of Resources and Expenditures of the National HIV and AIDS Response*, 2019.

[189] USAID Office of the Inspector General, *PEPFAR in Africa: USAID Expanded the Use of Local Partners but Should Reassess Local Partner Capacity to Meet Funding Goals*, 2021.

[190] State Department, "The United States and Nigeria: Strategic Partners," November 18, 2021.

[191] CRS assessment based on DOD notifications to Congress of planned security cooperation activities.

[192] State Department, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Nigeria," March 19, 2021.

[193] State Department, "Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: Nigeria Summary," n.d

the State Department's Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), an effort to build regional counterterrorism capabilities and coordination. Nigeria also has benefitted from U.S. support to the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF) coalition in the Lake Chad Basin.

U.S. "Leahy laws," which prohibit the provision of U.S. security assistance to security force units implicated in gross violations of human rights, have precluded some Nigerian military personnel from receiving certain types of U.S. security assistance.[194] Between 2015 and 2018, and again in 2020 and 2021, the State Department designated Nigeria under the Child Soldiers Prevention Act (CSPA, Title IV of P.L. 110-457) in connection with the use of child soldiers by state-backed militias battling Boko Haram and/or the use of children, generally in support roles, by Nigeria's military.[195] That designation can carry restrictions on U.S. security assistance, subject to a waiver; successive Administrations have fully waived the restrictions for Nigeria, citing the U.S. interest. In October 2021, President Biden waived all CSPA aid restrictions on Nigeria for FY2022.

The maintenance of U.S. defense articles provided to Nigeria has been a concern. For instance, a 2021 DOD evaluation of maritime security cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea between 2007 and 2018 identified "a strong reliance on the United States to provide parts and maintenance services" on the part of Nigeria's navy.[196] The study found that Nigerian authorities often failed to provide support infrastructure and supplies, such as fuel and internet, to sustain U.S.-provided materiel.

U.S. Military Sales and Transfers

Reported abuses by Nigerian security forces and other issues have impeded sales of U.S. defense articles and services to Nigeria. In 2014, the Obama Administration blocked the transfer of U.S.-origin attack helicopters from Israel to Nigeria amid "concerns about Nigeria's ability to use and maintain this type of helicopter [...and] the Nigerian military's protection of civilians when conducting military operations."[197] Nigeria's ambassador to the United States later criticized the United States' alleged refusal to sell "lethal equipment" to Nigeria, and Nigeria's military cancelled a planned U.S. military training exercise in late 2014.[198]

Recent attention has centered on the sale of A-29 Super Tucano aircraft to Nigeria. The Obama Administration considered a potential sale of 12 A-29s to Nigeria, but suspended consideration of the sale after a Nigerian jet bombed a displaced persons camp in early 2017.[199] The Trump Administration revived the proposal, and in 2017 notified Congress of the proposed sale, under FMS, of 12 A-29s and associated weaponry, training, and other support.[200] Some Members of Congress expressed opposition to the sale; none introduced or moved to force consideration of a joint resolution of disapproval.[201] The sale of the A-29s along with spare parts, logistics support,

[194] See "Human Rights Vetting: Nigeria and Beyond," hearing before the House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, 114th Cong., 2nd Sess., July 10, 2014.

[195] See State Department, Trafficking in Persons reports for 2015-2018, 2020, and 2021; on the use of children by the CJTF and Nigerian military, see State Department human rights reports for 2015-2018 and 2020.

[196] DOD, *U.S. Maritime Security Cooperation in the Gulf of Guinea (2007-2018): Strategic Evaluation*, 2021.

[197] State Department, "Daily Press Briefing - November 12, 2014," November 12, 2014.

[198] Michelle Faul, "Nigerian ambassador blasts US refusal to sell arms," AP, November 11, 2014; U.S. Embassy Abuja, "U.S. Government Regrets Nigerian Cancellation of Military Training," December 1, 2014.

[199] Phil Stewart and Warren Strobel, "Exclusive: U.S. seeks to approve attack aircraft for Nigeria in Boko Haram fight," Reuters, May 6, 2016.

[200] Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), "Government of Nigeria – A-29 Super Tucano Aircraft, Weapons, and Associated Support," August 3, 2017.

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

munitions, and construction of new facilities to house them went forward in 2017, valued at $496 million, the largest FMS case in sub-Saharan Africa to date.[202] The Nigerian Air Force took delivery of the planes in 2021 and has deployed them against extremists in the northeast as well as armed gangs in the northwest. In mid-2021, according to press accounts, Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) leadership reportedly placed an informal, pre-notification hold on a proposal to sell 12 AH-1 Cobra attack helicopters and accompanying systems to Nigeria.[203]

In addition to the sale of the A-29 aircraft, Nigerian FMS purchases have supported construction of new facilities at Kainji Air Base (in Niger State) to house the A-29s, as well as the acquisition of munitions and rocket propellants, aerial targeting systems, bomb equipment, and surveillance systems.[204] The United States has provided or committed to provide further materiel to Nigeria under other authorities, including unmanned aircraft and associated training and, under the Excess Defense Articles program, two Coast Guard cutters and 24 armor-protected vehicles.[205]

Humanitarian Assistance

The United States is the largest donor to the humanitarian response in Nigeria, providing over $2.0 billion in bilateral food and non-food assistance since FY2015 (**Table 2**). The majority of these funds have supported the humanitarian response in the northeast, though U.S. humanitarian assistance also has targeted other regions, including the northwest and Middle Belt.

Table 2. Humanitarian Assistance for Nigeria, FY2015-FY2021

$ thousands, obligations

	FY2015	FY2016	FY2017	FY2018	FY2019	FY2020	FY2021
USAID/NGA	33,800.0	10,853.7	6,182.7	-	-	-	-
USAID/FFP	12,396.8	50,782.5	250,085.3	197,615.5	199,936.2	-	-
USAID/OFDA	20,082.1	29,478.9	110,337.2	111,292.2	115,076.2	-	-
USAID/BHA	*	*	*	*	*	335,994.3	316,704.2
State/PRM	28,200.0	26,900.0	36,800.0	24,400.0	31,900.0	57,524.6	47,385.5
Total	**94,478.9**	**118,015.1**	**403,405.2**	**333,307.7**	**346,912.4**	**393,518.9**	**364,089.7**

Source: CRS calculations based on USAID, "Nigeria – Complex Emergency: Fact Sheet [CEFS] #4, FY2015" (September 30, 2015), "Lake Chad Basin CEFS #26, FY2017" (September 30, 2017), "Lake Chad Basin CEFS #21, FY2018" (September 30, 2018), "Lake Chad Basin CEFS #6, FY2019" (September 30, 2019), "Lake Chad Basin CEFS #1, FY2021" (December 21, 2020), "Lake Chad Basin CEFS #4, FY2021" (September 30, 2021).

Notes: NGA=Nigeria; FFP=Food for Peace; OFDA=Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance; BHA=Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (established in FY2020); PRM=Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. FY2020 totals include COVID-19-related assistance categorized as humanitarian aid.

Insecurity in the northeast has posed challenges for humanitarian access and the oversight of U.S. assistance. According to a 2020 audit by USAID's Inspector General, for instance, the award of a

[202] The contract notice for the aircraft sale is available at DOD, "Contracts for Nov. 28, 2018."

[203] Robbie Gramer, "U.S. Lawmakers Hold Up Major Proposed Arms Sale to Nigeria," *Foreign Policy*, July 27, 2021.

[204] On construction of the airfield, see DOD "Contracts for May 7, 2021"; on munitions, "Contracts For June 21, 2018," "Contracts For Sept. 14, 2018," "Contracts for Feb. 6, 2019," and "Contracts for July 31, 2020"; on targeting systems, "Contracts for Oct. 5, 2018" and "Contracts for Sept. 25, 2020; on bomb equipment, "Contracts for June 1, 2018,"; and on surveillance systems, "Contracts for Dec. 21, 2018."

[205] See DOD, "Contracts for May 8, 2020"; State Department, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Nigeria."

third party monitoring contract—used where site visits by U.S. staff are not feasible due to insecurity—encountered extensive delays, and "it was not until April 2019—4 years after the need was first identified" that the contract was awarded.[206] The risk of aid diversion by terrorists has further complicated humanitarian efforts, prompting heightened due diligence (see **Text Box**).

USAID Anti-Terrorism Support Measures in Nigeria: Humanitarian Implications

In 2017, USAID's Offices of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Food for Peace (FFP) introduced a grant contract provision requiring implementers in the Lake Chad Basin to attain written approval from USAID before distributing aid to individuals whom implementers "affirmatively know" to have been formerly associated with Boko Haram or IS-WA "as combatants or non-combatants."[207] Some observers have raised concerns with this provision, questioning the practicability of vetting beneficiaries' past affiliations with terrorist groups and/or alleging that it constitutes a violation of the core humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence.[208] USAID has disputed accusations that the provision has impeded programming, stating that the vetting requirement only comes into force in the event that there is knowledge of a beneficiary's past affiliation with a terrorist group, and that aid may proceed even in such instances, if determined to be consistent with U.S. law.[209]

Outlook and Issues for Congress

The escalation of insecurity across Nigeria has kindled debate among observers concerning the potential for territorial fragmentation or state failure in Africa's most populous country, a scenario that could threaten U.S. interests in Nigeria and the wider sub-region while generating demands for additional U.S. attention and resources. Amid mounting concern over Nigeria's trajectory, some Members of Congress have called for a reevaluation or reorientation of U.S. engagement.[210] Congressional deliberations over the best way forward for U.S.-Nigeria relations may depend, in part, on Members' assessments of the Nigerian government's commitment to addressing issues of concern to the United States, such as governance and human rights challenges. Such appraisals may inform debate over the relative merits of various policy tools for advancing U.S. interests in Nigeria, which may range from increased U.S. engagement and assistance to potential punitive measures, such as sanctions and aid restrictions.

Looking ahead, general elections scheduled for early 2023 arguably represent a test for Nigeria's democratic institutions as the country approaches a quarter-century of uninterrupted civilian rule. Recent Congresses have focused attention on Nigerian elections through hearings and resolutions calling for peaceful and credible polls, and have appropriated foreign assistance funding that has supported electoral activities.[211] Congress may consider these and other avenues of engagement,

[206] USAID OIG, *USAID Has Gaps in Planning, Risk Mitigation, and Monitoring of Its Humanitarian Assistance in Africa's Lake Chad Region*, 2020.

[207] Obi Anyadike, "Aid workers question USAID counter-terror clause in Nigeria," *The New Humanitarian*, November 5, 2019.

[208] Ibid; see also Jacob Kurtzer, *Out of Sight*, and Chiara Gillard et al., *Screening of final beneficiaries – a red line in humanitarian operations. An emerging concern in development work*, International Review of the Red Cross, February 2022. In 2021, Senator Booker cited Nigeria as an example of a context in which "compliance with some USAID policies, related to potential material support to terrorist groups, has made it nearly impossible to operate." See SFRC, "Nomination of Ambassador Samantha Power to be USAID Administrator," 117th Cong., 1st Sess., March 23, 2021.

[209] Lead Inspector General for East Africa and North and West Africa Counterterrorism Operations, *Quarterly Report to the United States Congress: October 1, 2019 – December 31, 2019*, February 7, 2020.

[210] In June 2021, for instance, Senator Robert Menendez stated that there was a need for "a fundamental rethink of our framework of our overall engagement" with Nigeria. SFRC, "Review of the FY 2022 State Department Budget Request," hearing, 117th Cong., 1st Sess., June 8, 2021.

[211] For recent examples of legislation focused on Nigeria's elections see, in the 114th Congress, H.Res. 143, H.Res. 147,

such as official communications and delegations to the country, as it weighs how best to support successful elections. More broadly, the forthcoming polls may offer an opportunity for Members of Congress to take stock of Nigeria's trajectory, assess opportunities and challenges in the bilateral relationship, and set priorities for engagement with incoming authorities.

The Nigerian government's governance and human rights record has driven U.S. critiques and strained the bilateral partnership, notably with respect to security cooperation. At the same time, U.S.-Nigerian defense ties have deepened through continued military sales and U.S. training and equipment activities. As noted above (see "U.S. Military Sales and Transfers"), some Members have signaled opposition to U.S. military sales to Nigeria due to human rights concerns. As Congress considers engagement with Nigeria, Members may possibly draw lessons from U.S. approaches to other countries where U.S. governance and human rights concerns have conflicted with U.S. security interests.[212] Congress also may evaluate the sustainability of past U.S. security investments in Nigeria in light of the Nigerian government's limited investment in maintaining U.S.-origin defense articles (see "Security Assistance and Cooperation").

Nigeria's size, economic weight, and regional influence position it to play an important role in the context of U.S.-Africa policy, as the attainment of various U.S. security, development, and global health objectives in the region arguably hinges on the advancement of such goals in Nigeria. As it considers budgetary, policy, and oversight priorities, Members may assess U.S. priorities in Nigeria in the context of various regional objectives. These might include:

- Development and global health promotion, in view of Nigeria's high poverty rate and disease burden—which, by virtue of Nigeria's demographic size, weigh heavily on broader poverty and global health trends in Africa. Members may review past U.S. development and health investments in Nigeria, and assess whether U.S. assistance is sufficient and properly targeted to help address Nigeria's needs.
- Expanding U.S.-Africa trade and investment, in light of Nigeria's economic potential and the extent of current U.S.-Nigeria commercial relations. Congress may consider what challenges might impede greater bilateral economic ties, and opportunities for expanding U.S. trade and investment through such initiatives as Prosper Africa;
- Strengthening democracy and promoting human rights, amid extensive governance challenges in Nigeria and democratic backsliding in the broader sub-region.[213] Congress may debate what mix of tools might best help promote good governance in Nigeria and weigh the merits of increased engagement (e.g., expanding democracy, human rights, and governance assistance and anti-kleptocracy efforts) against signals of U.S. concern and punitive measures (e.g., aid restrictions, sanctions, and public criticism);[214] and
- Global power competition in Africa, in the context of Nigeria's growing commercial and military relationship with China. Congress may weigh various approaches for advancing U.S. influence, such as by expanding bilateral cooperation (through increased diplomatic

and S.Res. 65, and in the 115th Congress, H.Con.Res. 4 and S.Con.Res. 1.

[212] See, e.g., Thomas Carothers and Benjamin Press, *Navigating the Democracy-Security Dilemma in U.S. Foreign Policy: Lessons from Egypt, India, and Turkey*, CEIP, November 4, 2021.

[213] CRS Insight IN11854, *"An Epidemic of Coups" in Africa? Issues for Congress*, by Alexis Arieff and Lauren Ploch Blanchard.

[214] In the 117th Congress, §6428 H.R. 4350, the House-passed NDAA, would have expressed the sense of Congress "on the role of human rights in reducing violence in Nigeria" and called on the United States Government to strengthen the capacity of Nigerian security forces to respond more effectively to terrorist attacks and sectarian violence. That provision was not adopted in the final bill, P.L. 117-81.

- engagement, foreign assistance, or military sales), promoting U.S. commercial competitiveness, and drawing attention to malign practices by foreign actors

How Congress balances these priorities, as well as other U.S. interests—such as enhancing peace and security, responding to humanitarian crises, and maintaining and advancing U.S. strategic access and influence—is likely to continue to shape U.S. engagement in Nigeria. Congress may continue to influence bilateral relations through its appropriation and oversight of U.S. assistance, consideration of U.S. military sales, and engagement (e.g., through hearings, statements, travel, and correspondence) on issues related to Nigeria and U.S.-Nigeria policy.

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