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## Nigeria: Current Issues

**Nigeria is considered a key country in Africa** because of its size and political and economic role in the region. The U.S. government considers its relationship with the country to be among the most important on the continent. Nigeria is Africa's largest economy, its largest oil producer, and its most populous country, with almost 180 million people, roughly divided between Muslims and Christians. Its Muslim population is among the largest in the world, vying with, and likely overtaking, Egypt's as the largest on the continent. Lagos, its commercial center, is among the world's largest cities. Nigeria, which currently holds a non-permanent seat on the U.N. Security Council, also ranks as a top troop contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations.

**Despite significant promise, Nigeria faces serious social, economic, and security challenges** that have the potential to threaten state and regional stability and affect global oil prices. The country has faced periodic political turmoil and economic crises. Political life has been scarred by ethnic, geographic, and religious conflict, and corruption and misrule have undermined the state's authority and legitimacy. Years of social unrest, criminality, and corruption in the oil-rich Niger Delta have hindered oil production, delayed the southern region's economic development, and contributed to piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Perceived neglect and economic marginalization also fuel resentment in the predominately Muslim north.

**A violent Islamist group, Boko Haram, has grown increasingly active in northeast Nigeria**, and the government has struggled to respond to the growing threat. U.S. officials have expressed concern about Boko Haram's impact on the north and related threats to national stability; its ties with another extremist group, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM); and the recruitment of Nigerians by other transnational terrorist groups, including Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP). The State Department designated Boko Haram and a splinter faction, Ansaru, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) in November 2013.

### Political Context

Nigeria is a federal republic with a political structure similar to that of the United States. Its president, legislators, and governors are elected on four-year terms. The country was ruled by the military for much of the four decades after independence before transitioning to civilian rule in 1999. Elections held in the subsequent decade were widely viewed as flawed, with each poll progressively worse than the last. The most recent national elections, in April 2011, were seen as more credible, but donors and advocacy groups continue to press the government to improve electoral procedures and prosecute cases of electoral fraud.

**The upcoming February 2015 elections** may be affected by domestic criticism of the Nigerian government's

Capital: Abuja

Population: 177 million

Comparative area:  
more than twice the size  
of California

Religions: 50% Muslim,  
40% Christian, 10%  
indigenous beliefs

Official language: English

Literacy: 61.3%

Life expectancy: 52.6 yrs.

GDP; GDP per capita: \$570 billion; \$1,813 per capita

Sources: Graphic created by CRS. Map data from  
Department of State and Esri (both 2013). Fact information  
from CIA World Factbook and IMF.



response to the Boko Haram threat, and in particular to the group's April 2014 kidnapping of more than 250 schoolgirls from the northeast town of Chibok. President Goodluck Jonathan, a Christian from southern Nigeria, is seeking reelection and appears set to face a strong challenge from an opposition alliance that draws support, in part, from popular disaffection with his administration in the north. Protests and violence across the north in the aftermath of Jonathan's 2011 electoral victory illustrated northern mistrust and dissatisfaction, which by many accounts has grown as Boko Haram activity has increased. The ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) has suffered internal divisions and defections to the opposition, and the party may face its toughest election yet in February. The opposition appears likely to coalesce behind a northern presidential candidate, possibly with a vice presidential candidate from the southwest, to challenge Jonathan. By many accounts, the elections may be close, and, given the stakes, may be a flashpoint for violence.

### Development Prospects and Challenges

**Nigeria's economy is now internationally recognized as the largest in Africa and the 26<sup>th</sup> largest globally.** Based on adjusted metrics, Nigeria's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is now almost double what it was previously thought to have been and substantially larger than South Africa's economy. It is also less reliant on oil than expected, although the sector continues to account for the majority of government revenues and export earnings. Nigeria lags far behind South Africa on the U.N. Human Development Index, though. There is massive income inequality, and a majority of the population faces extreme poverty.

**Some economists view Nigeria's long-term growth as threatened by chronic underperformance**, notably due to poor infrastructure and electricity shortages. Decades of economic mismanagement, instability, and corruption have hindered investment in Nigeria's education and social services systems and stymied industrial growth. Corruption

is “massive, widespread, and pervasive,” according to the State Department’s annual human rights reports.

**Divisions among ethnic groups, between regions, and between Christians and Muslims** often stem from issues relating to access to land, socioeconomic development, and jobs, and are sometimes fueled by politicians. By some estimates, 16,000 Nigerians have died in localized clashes in the last decade, including more than 800 people killed in 2011 in post-election clashes. Nigeria now has the largest displaced population in Africa—an estimated 3.3 million people—and the third largest in the world.

## Security Concerns

**Boko Haram has grown increasingly active and deadly in its attacks against state and civilian targets in Nigeria since 2010**, drawing on a narrative of vengeance for state abuses to elicit recruits and sympathizers. More than 11,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Boko Haram violence, and some 1.5 million have been displaced. Boko Haram has publicly called for an uprising against secular authority and a war against Christianity. Its attacks have not exclusively, or even primarily, targeted Christians, who are a minority in the north, where the group has been most active. The group’s periodic attacks on churches and Christian communities nevertheless fuel existing religious tensions in the country.

**Multiple factors have undermined the Nigerian security forces’ response to Boko Haram**, notably security sector corruption and mismanagement. By many accounts, troops are not adequately resourced or equipped to counter the insurgency. Abuses by Nigerian forces have also taken a toll on civilians and complicated U.S. efforts to pursue greater counterterrorism cooperation with Nigeria, despite shared concerns about Boko Haram and its ties to regional terrorist groups and operatives. Coordination on counterterrorism efforts has also been hampered at times by a lack of cooperation from Nigerian officials.

**Boko Haram currently appears to pose a threat primarily to stability in northern Nigeria**, and potentially to surrounding areas in neighboring countries. The group also poses a threat to international targets, including Western citizens, in the region. Boko Haram’s leader has issued direct threats against the United States, but to date no U.S. citizens are known to have been kidnapped or killed by the group. Boko Haram has made rhetorical pledges of solidarity and support for Al Qaeda and its affiliates, but the Obama Administration does not currently consider the group to be affiliated with Al Qaeda’s central leadership.

**In the southern Niger Delta region, local grievances related to oil production have fueled conflict and criminality for over a decade.** Government efforts to negotiate with local militants and an amnesty program have quieted the restive region, but the peace is fragile. Some militants remain involved in various local and transnational criminal activities, including piracy and drug and arms trafficking networks. These networks overlap with oil theft networks and contribute to the rising trend of piracy off the Nigerian coast and in the wider Gulf of Guinea, now considered one of the world’s most dangerous bodies of water. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime suggests that

most piracy in the region can be traced back to the Niger Delta. Involvement in the theft and illegal trade of crude oil is not limited to Delta militants—politicians, security officers, and oil industry personnel are widely rumored to be implicated. Efforts to addressing oil theft are further hampered by a lack of transparency in the oil industry.

## U.S.-Nigeria Relations and U.S. Assistance

**The Obama Administration considers its relationship with Nigeria to be among the most important on the continent.** Diplomatic engagement is sometimes tempered, however, by Nigerian perceptions of U.S. intrusion in regional or domestic affairs, and by U.S. concern with human rights, governance, and corruption issues.

**The United States has been supportive of reform initiatives in Nigeria**, including anti-corruption efforts, economic and electoral reforms, energy sector privatization, and peace and development efforts in the Niger Delta. In 2010, the Obama and Jonathan Administrations established the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission, a strategic dialogue to address issues of mutual concern; its working groups meet regularly. The State Department maintains a travel warning for U.S. citizens regarding travel to Nigeria, noting the risks of armed attacks in the northeast and the threat of kidnapping throughout the country, including in the Niger Delta, and currently restricts U.S. officials from all but essential travel to all northern states.

**Total U.S.-Nigeria trade was valued at over \$18 billion in 2013**, and the United States is the largest source of FDI in Nigeria. Nigeria has routinely ranked among the United States’ largest sources of imported oil. U.S. imports comprised over 40% of Nigeria’s total crude oil exports until 2011, but U.S. purchases of Nigerian oil have since plummeted as domestic U.S. crude supply has increased.

**Congress oversees an estimated \$700 million in U.S. foreign aid programs in Nigeria**—one of the largest U.S. bilateral assistance packages in Africa. The State Department’s FY2015 foreign aid request includes more than \$720 million for Nigeria, most of which is focused on health programs. Nigeria is a focus country under the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) and the President’s Malaria Initiative (PMI), and a beneficiary of the Feed the Future (FTF) initiative. The Administration has identified Nigeria as one of six initial partner countries for its Power Africa initiative, which aims to double access to power in sub-Saharan Africa. U.S. security assistance to Nigeria has totaled over \$20 million annually in recent years, most of which has focused on enhancing law enforcement, counternarcotics, peacekeeping capacity. U.S. counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria has been constrained by various factors, but is growing. Nigerian forces are expected to participate in a new 3-year, \$40 million regional program to counter Boko Haram.

CRS Reports RL33964, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, R43558, *Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions*.

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