



## Nigeria

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, largest oil producer, and most populous country, with almost 180 million people, roughly divided between Muslims and Christians. Its Muslim population is among the largest in the world, and has likely overtaken Egypt's as the largest on the continent. Lagos, Nigeria's commercial center, is among the world's largest cities. The country, 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. Nigerian politics have 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.

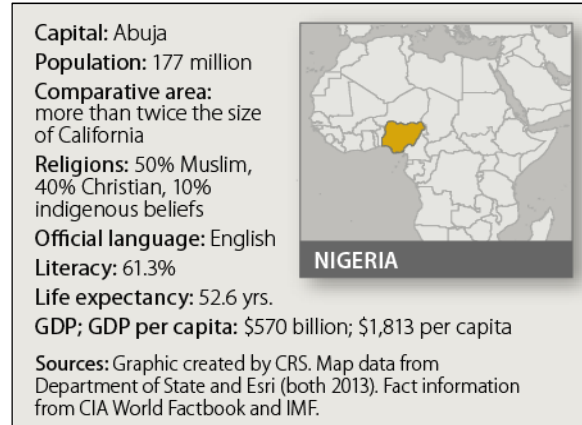
The Nigerian government has struggled to respond to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram, a violent Islamist extremist group based in the northeast. U.S. officials have expressed concern about Boko Haram's impact in Nigeria and neighboring countries; and its ties with other extremist groups, notably the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, to which Boko Haram recently pledged allegiance. The recruitment of Nigerians by other transnational terrorist groups has also been a concern. 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. 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. Elections in 2011 were seen as more credible, although they were followed by violent protests in parts of the north that left more than 800 people dead and illustrated northern mistrust and dissatisfaction with the government.

Nigeria's 2015 elections were its most competitive contest to date, and were viewed as a critical test for its political leaders, its security forces, and its people. They have been widely hailed as a historic event, with the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and its incumbent president,

Figure 1. Nigeria Facts



Goodluck Jonathan, losing power to a new opposition coalition, led by former military ruler Muhammadu Buhari. Jonathan is the first incumbent Nigerian president to lose an election. The polls had been controversially delayed by six weeks at the behest of security officials, from February to March 28 and April 11, which had heightened concerns about tensions around the polls and raised questions about alleged political interference in the electoral process.

Buhari's All Progressives Congress (APC) capitalized on popular frustration with the Jonathan government's response to rising insecurity and allegations of large-scale state corruption, among other concerns, winning a majority in the legislature and a majority of the state elections. The PDP had suffered internal divisions and defections to the APC since late 2013, and President Jonathan had come under increasing criticism from some prominent leaders in the party. Decreased support and turnout for the PDP in the elections appears to be linked, in part, to public views of the government's response to the Boko Haram threat, in particular to the April 2014 kidnapping of more than 270 schoolgirls from the northeast town of Chibok and the group's subsequent territorial advance.

### Security Concerns

Boko Haram has grown increasingly deadly in its attacks against state and civilian targets in Nigeria since 2010, drawing in part 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 called for an uprising against secular authority and a war against Christianity. Its attacks have not primarily targeted Christians, who are a minority in the north, where the group has been most active, but periodic attacks on Christian communities nevertheless fuel existing religious tensions in the country. Boko Haram commenced a territorial offensive in mid-2014 that Nigerian forces struggled to reverse until

early 2015, when regional military forces, primarily from neighboring Chad, launched an offensive against the group. Private mercenaries have also been used in the campaign.

Multiple factors have undermined the Nigerian response to Boko Haram, notably security sector corruption and mismanagement. By many accounts, Nigerian troops are not adequately resourced or equipped to counter the insurgency. Abuses by Nigerian forces have taken a toll on civilians and complicated U.S. efforts to pursue greater counterterrorism cooperation, despite shared concerns about Boko Haram. Coordination 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 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's March 2015 pledge of allegiance to the self-described Islamic State has raised its profile and may provide recruitment and fundraising opportunities. The extent to which affiliation might facilitate operational ties between the groups remains unclear.

In the southern Niger Delta region, local grievances related to oil production have fueled conflict and criminality for over a decade. Government negotiations with local militants and an amnesty program have quieted the area, 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, 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 cut oil theft are also hampered by a lack of transparency in the oil industry.

## 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 the country'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. An estimated 16,000 Nigerians have died in local clashes in the last decade, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced.

## 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 has been tempered, however, by Nigerian perceptions of U.S. intrusion in domestic and regional affairs, and by U.S. concern with human rights, governance, and corruption issues. In 2010, the Obama and Jonathan Administrations established the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission, a strategic dialogue to address issues of mutual concern. 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 routinely ranked among the United States' largest sources of imported oil, with U.S. imports comprising over 40% of Nigeria's total crude oil exports until 2011. U.S. purchases of Nigerian oil have since plummeted as domestic U.S. crude supply has increased.

Congress oversees some \$700 million per year in U.S. foreign aid programs in Nigeria—one of the largest U.S. bilateral aid packages in Africa. The Administration's FY2016 aid request includes more than \$607 million for Nigeria, much of it focused on health programs. Nigeria is a focus country under the President's health initiatives, Feed the Future (FTF), Power Africa, and the new Security Governance Initiative (SGI). U.S. security assistance to Nigeria has totaled more than \$15 million annually in recent years, much of it focused on enhancing law enforcement, counternarcotics, peacekeeping capacity. Counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria has been constrained by various factors. Nigeria is expected to benefit from a new 3-year, \$40 million regional program to counter Boko Haram, and may receive additional support if the new government is seen to be more responsive to U.S. concerns about Nigeria's counterterrorism approach.

See CRS Report R43881, *Nigeria's 2015 Elections and the Boko Haram Crisis*, CRS Report RL33964, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, and CRS In Focus IF10173, *Boko Haram*.

**Lauren Ploch Blanchard**, lploch@crs.loc.gov, 7-7640