



Updated December 3, 2018

Nigeria

Successive Administrations have viewed the U.S.-Nigeria relationship as one of the most important in Africa, given Nigeria's size and political and economic role in the region. It is Africa's largest economy and most populous country, with more than 200 million people, divided roughly evenly between Muslims and Christians. Its Muslim population is among the largest in the world. Lagos, Nigeria's commercial center, is one of the world's largest cities.

Despite significant promise, Nigeria faces serious social, economic, and security challenges. Nigerian politics have been scarred by ethnic, geographic, and religious conflict. 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 development, and contributed to piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Perceived neglect and economic marginalization also have fueled resentment in the predominately Muslim north. Communal grievances drive conflict in the country's Middle Belt.

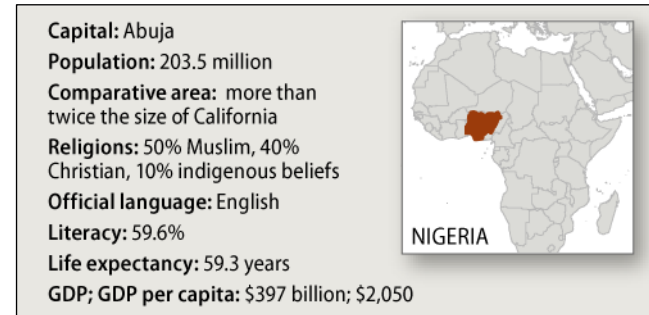
With its neighbors, Nigeria has waged a military offensive against Boko Haram, a violent Islamist extremist group that pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015 and subsequently split into two factions. Nigeria's counterinsurgency efforts have been hamstrung by corruption and mismanagement. Amid the insecurity, a severe humanitarian crisis in Nigeria's northeast continues. Over 2.5 million people are critically food insecure, and isolated areas remain at risk of famine if aid is cut off.

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. Subsequent elections were widely viewed as flawed. Observers viewed elections in 2011 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 leaders, its security forces, and its people. In what observers widely hailed as a historic transition, the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and its president, Goodluck Jonathan, lost power to Muhammadu Buhari and his All Progressives Congress (APC). In addition to the presidency, the APC won a majority in the legislature. Buhari, a former military junta leader, and the opposition coalition capitalized on popular frustration with the Jonathan government's response to rising insecurity, mounting economic pressures, and allegations of large-scale state corruption, among other issues. Jonathan was Nigeria's first incumbent president to lose an election.

Figure 1. Nigeria at a Glance



Source: CRS. Map data from Department of State and Esri, Figures are 2017 estimates from CIA World Factbook and IMF.

With elections slated for February 2019, prospects for a second term for Buhari are uncertain. Critics of his first term doubt his ability to foster effective change. His health is a concern: Buhari, 75, spent significant time in London for treatment of an undisclosed condition in 2017. His primary challenger is Atiku Abubakar, a former vice president who quit the APC in late 2017 and rejoined PDP. Both men hail from the North and are Muslim. The APC has suffered high-profile defections in the legislature as politicians position for the 2019 polls.

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. Some 16,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Boko Haram violence, and two million Nigerians are internally displaced. Boko Haram has called for an uprising against secular authority and a war against Christianity. Its attacks have not primarily targeted Christians, a minority in the north where the group has been most active, but periodic attacks on Christian communities fuel existing religious tensions in the country.

Boko Haram launched an offensive in mid-2014 that Nigerian forces struggled to reverse until early 2015, when regional forces, primarily from Chad, launched operations against the group. The Nigerian army has since reclaimed most of the territory, although many areas remain insecure.

Boko Haram's kidnapping of more than 270 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok in 2014 raised its international profile, as did its 2015 pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State. The Islamic State subsequently replaced Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau in 2016 with Abu Musab al-Barnawi, reportedly the son of the group's founder, as head of the Islamic State-West Africa (ISIS-WA). Shekau rejected his ouster and continues to lead a faction that remains widely referred to as Boko Haram. The relationship between the two factions is unclear and subject to debate.

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA currently appear to pose a threat primarily to northern Nigeria and surrounding areas in the Lake Chad Basin. They also pose a threat to international targets in the region. Boko Haram's leadership has issued threats against the United States, but no U.S. citizens are known to have been kidnapped or killed by the group.

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 quieted the area, but attacks on oil installations resumed in 2016, dramatically curtailing production. Some Delta militants remain involved in various criminal activities, including piracy and drug and arms trafficking networks. These networks overlap with oil theft networks and contribute to piracy off the Nigerian coast and in the wider Gulf of Guinea. The U.N. 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 involved.

In the Middle Belt region, violent competition for resources has increased between nomadic herders, many belonging to the largely Muslim Fulani ethnic group, and settled farming communities, many of them Christian. Factors underlying the deadly conflict are complex but include ethno-religious tensions, availability of sophisticated weapons, and desertification. Farmer-herder conflicts occur against a backdrop of deadly, cyclical violence along ethnic, regional, and religious lines that has claimed an estimated 20,000 lives and displaced hundreds of thousands over the past two decades. Inter-communal conflict often stems from issues relating to socioeconomic opportunities and land access, and is sometimes fueled by elites.

Multiple factors have undermined Nigeria's response to these security challenges. Corruption is systemic and drains resources at all levels of the security apparatus. By many accounts, Nigerian troops are inadequately resourced and equipped. Abuses by Nigerian forces in the context of counterterrorism operations have taken a toll on civilians and reportedly fueled extremist recruitment in some areas, complicating U.S. efforts to pursue greater counterterrorism cooperation. A lack of cooperation from Nigerian officials also has hampered coordination at times. U.S. officials have praised Buhari for his anti-corruption efforts, which have included the pursuit of corruption charges against several high-level former security officials.

Development Prospects and Challenges

Nigeria's economy is the largest in Africa. The petroleum sector accounts for the majority of government revenues and export earnings. Consequently, the resurgence of Niger Delta militancy and accompanying decline in oil production has sharply constrained Nigeria's economic performance and outlook. Along with low oil prices, the fall in oil output caused Nigeria to slide into recession in 2016. Its economic recovery has been relatively slow, with growth estimated at 1.9% in 2018. Despite Buhari's stated commitment to liberalization, analysts question whether his administration has reassured investors. Some view long-term growth as threatened by chronic underperformance, largely due to

poor infrastructure and electricity shortages. Decades of mismanagement, instability, and corruption have hindered investment in education and social services and stymied industrial growth. The State Department has described corruption as "massive, widespread, and pervasive."

Nigeria ranks poorly on the U.N. Human Development Index. There is massive income inequality, and a majority of the population faces extreme poverty. The situation is most acute in the northeast, where Boko Haram violence has devastated economic activity and hindered access to aid. By many accounts, Nigeria's response to the crisis in the northeast was delayed and has been marked by systemic corruption, mismanagement, and abuses, including sexual violence, against internally displaced persons. The U.N. estimates that 7.7 million people in the northeast need aid; more than 50% are children.

U.S. Relations and Assistance

U.S. relations with Nigeria appear generally consistent under the Trump Administration with U.S. policy under the Obama Administration. The Obama Administration treated the Nigeria relationship as a top priority on the continent. President Trump's call to Buhari in early 2017 was the first to any Sub-Saharan African leader, and then-Secretary of State Rex Tillerson visited Nigeria during his trip to Africa in March 2018. Buhari was the first African leader to visit the Trump White House, in April 2018. Diplomatic engagement has been tempered at times by Nigerian perceptions of U.S. intrusion in domestic and regional affairs, and by U.S. concern with human rights, governance, and corruption issues. The U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission, a strategic dialogue to address issues of mutual concern, was established in 2010.

The United States is the largest source of Foreign Direct Investment in Nigeria. Nigeria routinely ranked among the largest U.S. 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 more than \$600 million per year on average in U.S. foreign aid to Nigeria—one of the largest U.S. bilateral aid packages in Africa. U.S. humanitarian aid in response to the emergency in the Lake Chad Basin has totaled \$435 million in FY2018, including \$333 million for Nigeria alone. The FY2019 aid request includes almost \$352 million for Nigeria (not including anticipated food aid), largely focused on health programs. This would represent a decline from FY2017, when Nigeria received over \$560 million in non-humanitarian aid.

U.S. security assistance to Nigeria has focused primarily on enhancing counternarcotics, maritime security, and peacekeeping capacities. Counterterrorism support has been constrained by various factors, although Nigeria has received infantry training for some troops deployed in the northeast, among other initiatives.

Lauren Ploch Blanchard, Specialist in African Affairs

IF10174

Disclaimer

This document was prepared by the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS serves as nonpartisan shared staff to congressional committees and Members of Congress. It operates solely at the behest of and under the direction of Congress. Information in a CRS Report should not be relied upon for purposes other than public understanding of information that has been provided by CRS to Members of Congress in connection with CRS's institutional role. CRS Reports, as a work of the United States Government, are not subject to copyright protection in the United States. Any CRS Report may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without permission from CRS. However, as a CRS Report may include copyrighted images or material from a third party, you may need to obtain the permission of the copyright holder if you wish to copy or otherwise use copyrighted material.