

Nigeria: Overview and U.S. Policy

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Nigeria: Overview and U.S. Policy

Overview. Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country, largest democracy, top oil producer, and one of its largest economies. It is the United States’ second-largest trade partner in Sub-Saharan Africa and has often ranked among the top 10 recipients of U.S. aid globally. Nigerians are the largest Africa-born population in the United States. Security, governance, and human rights concerns in the country, including with respect to religious freedom, have drawn congressional attention and sometimes pose challenges for U.S. engagement. This report provides an overview of a broad range of issues in Nigeria on which Members of Congress have engaged.

People and Politics. Nigeria’s population of 250 million people is among the world’s largest and may surpass that of the United States by mid-century. The country is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse. It is home to one of the world’s largest Christian populations and one of the largest Muslim populations. Violence against Christians in Nigeria has become a flashpoint in the U.S.-Nigeria relationship. Some people allege that a Christian “genocide” is occurring; others reject that narrative and counter that violence is widespread and the drivers are multifaceted.

Nigeria has been a multiparty republic since 1999, after decades of military rule. Corruption and security force abuses persist, and local journalists and civic activists sometimes face threats and abuse. President Bola Tinubu took office in 2023, following elections reportedly marred by extensive administrative shortcomings and alleged vote rigging. President Tinubu has drawn praise from investors and rating agencies with a series of far-reaching economic reforms, but he has faced public discontent over rising costs and declining purchasing power. Nigeria’s next general elections are scheduled for January 2027.

Security. Nigeria faces serious security challenges on multiple fronts. In the northeast, conflict between Islamist insurgents and government forces has killed tens of thousands of civilians and displaced millions. In northwest and central Nigeria, farmer-herder disputes have fueled ethno-religious violence, bandit groups are a growing threat, and Islamist extremist activity is spreading. The country also struggles with separatist violence in the southeast, criminality in the oil-rich Niger Delta, and a nationwide kidnapping epidemic. The deterioration of security conditions in Nigeria over the past decade has strained the country’s military and police, and perpetrators of violence often evade arrest or prosecution. Security forces have been implicated in extensive abuses, spurring local distrust and sometimes complicating U.S. security cooperation.

Economy. With a rapidly growing population, extensive oil and gas reserves, and significant prospects in the services, agriculture, and manufacturing sectors, Nigeria is a major African economic power with immense potential. The country also has one of the world’s largest populations living in extreme poverty and the largest number of people without access to electricity. A dearth of reliable electricity constrains economic activity. Crude oil and other mineral fuels have long dominated Nigerian exports to the United States. Dependence on petroleum exports makes Nigeria’s economy and state revenues highly vulnerable to price volatility. The new Dangote refinery, Africa’s largest crude processing facility, aims to end the country’s longstanding reliance on refined fuel imports, but in the near term, Nigeria continues to import some crude for the refinery due to insufficient domestic crude supply.

Humanitarian Crisis. Conflict, related displacement, climate shocks, and inflation have spurred an unprecedented food security crisis. Over 3.7 million Nigerians are internally displaced, including 2.3 million in the northeast. An estimated 36 million Nigerians face acute food insecurity in 2026, amid a steep decline in U.S. and other donor assistance.

U.S. Policy, Military Operations, and Assistance. U.S. policymakers have often characterized the U.S.-Nigeria relationship as one of the most important U.S. partnerships in Africa. Congressional interests vary: trade and investment opportunities are a focal point for some, while religious freedom, human rights abuses, terrorist activity, and humanitarian needs have also drawn congressional concern. Some Members of Congress have focused particular attention on reports of Christian persecution in Nigeria, as has the Trump Administration, which designated Nigeria as a Country of Particular Concern for religious freedom in October 2025. President Trump directed military strikes in northwest Nigeria in December, targeting Islamic State (IS) elements in a stated effort to protect Christians in the country. The U.S. military has since conducted several operations against IS targets in the northeast in coordination with Nigerian forces. The Trump Administration has instituted immigration policies that restrict travel to the United States by Nigerian nationals, among others, including for study and business. As a major recipient of U.S. foreign assistance, Nigeria has been affected by the Administration’s foreign aid cuts, which have spurred congressional debate and court challenges. In December 2025, Nigeria signed a five-year global health cooperation agreement with the Trump Administration, under which the country is expected to gradually assume greater financial responsibility as the Administration reduces U.S. health assistance.

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Introduction

With Africa's largest population and one of its largest economies, Nigeria is a major regional actor. The country is Africa's top oil producer, its largest democracy, and it hosts the headquarters of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Nigeria's potential is tempered, however, by governance, security, and economic problems, including pervasive corruption, widespread and deepening poverty, and persistent insecurity. The country struggles with immense development gaps.¹ Security threats have metastasized over the past decade, straining Nigeria's military and police forces and fueling a rise in vigilantism.

President Bola Tinubu, elected in 2023, inherited a fiscal crisis and an underperforming economy, serious security and humanitarian challenges, and a populace distrustful of government and divided along ethnic, religious, and regional lines.² Tinubu has won international praise for undertaking major economic reforms aimed at improving fiscal discipline, attracting investment, and stimulating growth.³ His economic policies exacerbated a cost-of-living crisis, though, and have spurred discontent.⁴ His government is grappling with a complex array of security threats, including an expanding landscape of jihadist groups, a separatist movement in the southeast, banditry, and other organized crime. Boko Haram, once Nigeria's primary jihadist threat, has been eclipsed by its offshoot, the Islamic State West Africa Province (IS-WA/ISWAP), and Islamist militants from the Sahel have also expanded their operations into Nigeria.

The U.S. relationship with Nigeria has been one of the most substantial in Africa for decades: Nigeria is the second-largest U.S. trade partner in Africa and is often among the top ten recipients of U.S. foreign aid globally.⁵ People from Nigeria comprise the largest Africa-born diaspora population in the United States. Strategic competition concerns may increase some policymakers' interest in bolstering ties with Nigeria: the People's Republic of China (PRC or China), Nigeria's largest bilateral lender, reportedly seeks to establish a naval presence on Africa's Atlantic coast, while Russia has expanded its influence in West Africa after a series of coups in the region.⁶

Reports of religious persecution, corruption, and security force abuses have drawn concern from some in Congress and sometimes complicate bilateral engagement. Violence against Christians in Nigeria, home to one of the world's largest Christian populations, has attracted growing attention. In response, President Donald Trump threatened in late 2025 to suspend foreign aid and to order military action, and on December 25, he directed strikes against Islamic State targets in Nigeria. Security cooperation has since increased and the U.S. military has conducted further operations, drawing mixed reactions in Congress. U.S. and Nigerian officials are engaged in ongoing talks about religious freedom concerns. As Congress weighs U.S. policy toward Nigeria and related budget considerations, Members may assess U.S. interests in the region and tools to address them, and the extent to which they concur with Administration approaches.

¹ For more, see the World Bank's *Nigeria Development Update* series and its *Nigeria Poverty Assessment 2022*.

² Prior to the 2023 elections, almost 90% of Nigerians surveyed by Afrobarometer, a survey research network, stated that Nigeria was moving in the wrong direction, 71% said they had little to no trust in the incumbent president, and nearly 80% said they had little to no trust in the legislature. Afrobarometer, *Nigeria Round 9 Summary of Results*, 2022.

³ International Monetary Fund (IMF), Article IV Consultation Staff Reports, 2024-2026; Biden White House, "Readout of President Biden's Engagement with Nigerian President Bola Tinubu," September 10, 2023.

⁴ Afrobarometer, "Nigerians say country is headed in wrong direction, oppose fuel-subsidy removal," March 19, 2025.

⁵ Department of State, "The United States and Nigeria: Partnering for Prosperity," January 23, 2024.

⁶ Department of Defense (DOD), *Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2024*, *Annual Report to Congress*, December 18, 2024, and other editions; Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), *Mapping China's Strategic Port Development in Africa*, March 10, 2025.

Table I. Nigeria at a Glance



Population: 250 million; 2.37% growth		Size: slightly more than twice the size of California
Languages: English (official), Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo (Ibo), Fulani, over 500 other indigenous languages		Ethnic groups: Hausa 30%, Yoruba 15.5%, Igbo (Ibo) 15.2%, Fulani 6%, Tiv 2.4%, Kanuri/BeriBeri 2.4% Ibibio 1.8%, Ijaw/Izon 1.8%, other 24.9% (2018)
Literacy: 63% (male 73.7%, female 53.3%; 2021)		Religions: Muslim 54%, Christian 46%, other 0.6% (2018)
Life Expectancy: 62.2 years (2024)	Median Age: 19.5 years	Maternal mortality rate: 993 deaths/100,000 live births (2023)
HIV Adult (ages 15-49) Prevalence: 1.2% (2024)		Total fertility rate: 4.51 children born/woman
Currency: The naira		GDP: \$377 billion; \$1,556 per capita; 4.06% growth

Source: CRS map created using State Department, Global Administrative Areas (GADM), and Esri data. Population and economic data drawn from the U.S. Census Bureau International Database, CIA World Factbook, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, World Health Organization, and International Monetary Fund. Figures are 2026 estimates unless otherwise specified. Ethnic and religion estimates from CIA World Factbook.

Demography

Nigeria, with roughly 250 million people, is the world's sixth most populous country, and its population could exceed 400 million by 2050, potentially passing the United States.⁷ The median age is 19. Roughly 60% of Nigerians are under 25, raising the possibility of a “demographic dividend” in the decades ahead.⁸ This “youth bulge” presents both an opportunity and challenges: a larger working-age population could accelerate economic growth, but it could also spur instability, given high youth unemployment and weak education and healthcare systems.⁹

⁷ U.S. Census Bureau, International Database. See also United Nations (UN), *World Population Prospects 2024*.

⁸ A demographic dividend refers to growth that can result from a rise in a country's working-age population; see UN, “Harnessing the Economic Dividends from Demographic Change,” July 6, 2023. Data on Nigeria's population under 25 from U.S. Census Bureau, International Database, “Population by Age” Tables, accessed April 2026.

⁹ Peace Research Institute Oslo, “Unlocking Nigeria's Future Demographic Dividend Through Its Youth,” June 2025.

The population is highly diverse, with hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups. There are no official statistics on ethnic or religious affiliations; efforts to collect such data have been highly controversial.¹⁰ Nigeria's largest ethnic groups are the Hausa, who are concentrated in the north and often considered as a political bloc with the country's much smaller Fulani population; the Yoruba, who are a majority in the southwest; and the Igbo, who are predominant in the southeast.

Nigeria is the only country that ranks both among the world's 10 largest Christian populations and 10 largest Muslim populations.¹¹ It is often described as roughly balanced between the two religions, although the Muslim population is reportedly growing more rapidly.¹² The south has a Christian majority while the north has a Sunni Muslim majority, but people of both faiths are found across Nigeria, and the so-called Middle Belt is religiously diverse. Significant diversity exists within religions: the Muslim population includes Sunni, Shia, heterodox, and non-sect-specific adherents, and the Christian population includes followers of Catholicism, Protestant denominations, and nondenominational churches. Some Nigerians maintain indigenous beliefs, sometimes alongside Christian or Islamic practices; others do not affiliate with any religious group. President Bola Tinubu's family is illustrative of Nigeria's religious diversity: Tinubu, an ethnic Yoruba from the southwest, is Muslim, while his wife is an ordained Christian minister in one of Nigeria's largest Pentecostal denominations; they have Christian and Muslim children.

Politics and Governance

Nigeria, which gained independence from British colonial rule in 1960, experienced almost three decades of military rule before transitioning to democracy in 1999. A federal republic with 36 states, its government structure resembles that of the United States, with a bicameral National Assembly composed of a 109-member Senate and 360-member House of Representatives.

Nigeria suffered a devastating civil war between 1967 and 1970 involving an Igbo-led separatist insurgency in the southeast. The country has since adopted formal and informal institutions to distribute political power and public resources along ethno-regional lines to manage potential tensions. Appointments to the civil service and other state posts are constitutionally required to ensure "no predominance" by a single ethnic or regional group. Electoral rules favor the formation of cross-ethnic political parties to win office, and political parties usually rotate candidates for office and split tickets along ethno-regional and religious lines.¹³

Former President Muhammadu Buhari—a former military ruler from the north who was elected in 2015 and re-elected in 2019—faced term limits in 2023, and his party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), chose Bola Tinubu, a former governor of southwestern Lagos State (which includes the megacity of Lagos) as its candidate for the 2023 elections. Like Buhari, Tinubu and his running mate Kashim Shettima, a former governor of northeast Borno State, are both Muslim, breaking with the convention of a presidential ticket split along both regional and religious lines.

¹⁰ Nigeria's 1963 census was the last to produce data on ethnic or religious affiliation, and it featured extensive irregularities. A subsequent military government annulled the results of a 1973 census exercise that was 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, but their methodologies and results are subject to debate.

¹¹ Pew Research Center, "5 Facts About Religion in Nigeria," November 11, 2025.

¹² Higher fertility rates in the north have reportedly given Muslims a slight majority. See *The Economist*, "Why the Fertility Gap Between North and South Nigeria Matters," November 7, 2024.

¹³ Nigeria's constitution requires a presidential candidate to get at least a quarter of votes cast in two-thirds of the states; candidates for governor must secure a quarter of votes cast in each of the state's local government areas. The practice of rotating candidates on an ethno-regional basis is known as "zoning." Parties often, but not always, choose candidates to rotate the presidency between north and south after two terms in office, and run religiously split tickets.

Tinubu won the 2023 presidential election with 37% of the vote. His closest challengers were Atiku Abubakar of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a former vice president and veteran presidential contender, and the Labor Party's Peter Obi, a businessman and former governor whose populist campaign drew youth support, especially among his fellow Igbo in the southeast. The APC retained a majority in the Senate and its position as the largest party in the House. The APC took 18 governorships; the PDP took 12. (Several states have off-cycle gubernatorial polls.)

The general elections featured record-low turnout of under 27%, widespread delays and other logistical issues, and extensive rigging claims—though a domestic group that ran a U.S.-funded parallel vote tabulation assessed that fraud did not affect the overall outcome of the presidential election.¹⁴ Some Members of Congress raised concern around the polls, and international observers from the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute assessed they “fell well short of Nigerian citizens’ legitimate and reasonable expectations.”¹⁵ Abubakar and Obi contested the result, but their petitions were dismissed by Nigeria’s Supreme Court.

The Tinubu Administration

President Tinubu has pursued far-reaching economic reforms since taking office that have earned praise from credit rating agencies, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank.¹⁶ Key actions include unifying the official and parallel foreign exchange rates, removing politically sensitive fuel subsidies and reducing electricity subsidies, and recapitalizing commercial banks. The decades-old fuel subsidies kept local gas prices low but drained state finances (costing \$10 billion in 2022), enabled corruption, and incentivized cross-border smuggling.¹⁷ The subsidy cut was unpopular domestically: gas prices surged, and the price of goods and services spiked.¹⁸ The combination of the fuel subsidy cut and the unification of the naira’s exchange rate, which led to a steep currency devaluation, raised the cost of living. Food prices rose substantially, and protests and looting ensued.¹⁹ Rising business costs contributed to the exit of some foreign companies.

The government revised several of its reform initiatives in response to public discontent and introduced social protection measures, including cash transfers, grain distributions, and fertilizer and seed handouts. Protests against the policies persisted, however, and in 2024 police led a violent crackdown against protests known by the hashtag #EndBadGovernance. Over 1,000 people were arrested and at least 24 protesters were killed.²⁰ Dozens of protesters, including over 30 minors, were charged with treason and/or inciting a coup; the government later dropped the charges against the minors after a public outcry. Nigeria’s labor unions also organized strikes to protest the removal of fuel subsidies, arguing that the policy disproportionately harmed workers.

¹⁴ Yiaga Africa, *Dashed Hopes? Yiaga Africa Report on Nigeria’s 2023 General Election*, 2023. See also European Union Election Observation Mission, *Nigeria General Elections 25 February and 18 March: Final Report*, 2023.

¹⁵ Sen. Jim Risch, “U.S. Shouldn’t Rush to Embrace Nigerian Election Results,” March 2, 2023; Rep. Ilhan Omar, “Statement on Presidential Election in Nigeria,” March 3, 2023; and International Republican Institute/ National Democratic Institute International Election Observation Mission to Nigeria, *Final Report*, 2023.

¹⁶ S&P Global Ratings cited Tinubu’s reforms in upgrading Nigeria’s sovereign outlook from “negative” to “stable” in August 2023, and upgraded the outlook to “positive” in late 2025. See also the IMF’s Article IV reports and the World Bank’s *Nigeria Development Update* series.

¹⁷ Reuters, “Nigeria’s NNPC Spent \$10 Billion on Fuel Subsidy in 2022,” January 20, 2023.

¹⁸ Afrobarometer, “Nigerians Say Country Is Headed in Wrong Direction, Oppose Fuel-Subsidy Removal,” March 19, 2025.

¹⁹ Bloomberg, “Nigeria’s Deepening Cost-of-Living Crisis Is Turning Deadly,” March 9, 2024.

²⁰ *Al Jazeera*, “Nigerians Decry ‘Anti-Poor’ Measures in New Protests Against the Government,” October 1, 2024; Amnesty International (Amnesty), *Bloody August: Nigerian government’s violent crackdown on #EndBadGovernance protests*, November 28, 2024.

Three years in, reports suggest Tinubu's reforms have improved macroeconomic stability, boosted investor confidence, and spurred growth, but much of the population still struggles with the cost of living and views Nigeria's economic situation negatively, with insecurity also remaining a top concern.²¹ The government reportedly disrupted a coup plot in October 2025. Authorities initially denied the reports, but 16 officers were arrested and six have since been charged.²²

Civic Space and the 2027 Elections

Nigeria's civic space has expanded since the return to civilian rule in 1999, and its civil society today comprises a broad range of advocacy groups, labor unions, and ethnic, cultural, and religious associations. Successive governments have restricted freedoms of speech, assembly, and the press, however. Activists and journalists have faced threats and criminal charges for commenting on sensitive issues, and Nigerian police have been repeatedly implicated in using excessive force against protesters.²³ Freedom House has ranked Nigeria "Partly Free" in its Freedom in the World index, noting that while the quality of elections has improved since the transition to democratic rule, polls have continued to be marred by irregularities, corruption is endemic, civil liberties are undermined by religious and ethnic bias, women and LGBT+ people are subject to societal discrimination, and journalists face harassment, abuse, and arbitrary arrest.²⁴ CIVICUS, another group that monitors civic space, categorizes Nigeria as "repressed."²⁵

The next presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for January 16, 2027, with state polls to follow on February 6. President Tinubu, 74, is running for re-election. Political realignments since 2023 have weakened the opposition PDP and empowered the APC; by early 2026, most of the PDP's governors had defected to the APC.²⁶ New coalitions have emerged, including the African Democratic Congress (ADC), which has chosen Atiku Abubakar, 79, as its presidential candidate, and the Nigeria Democratic Congress (NDC), which is backing Peter Obi, 64.

Corruption

Corruption in Nigeria is widely seen as pervasive.²⁷ Surveys show widespread suspicion of government officials and suggest most Nigerians view the government as performing poorly in fighting corruption.²⁸ Several state agencies are tasked with countering corruption, including the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which has collaborated with U.S. agencies and received U.S. assistance. These agencies have seized billions of dollars' worth of ill-gotten assets and prosecuted a number of current and former officials. The government also has worked with foreign partners, including the United States, to repatriate the proceeds of past corruption.

²¹ *Financial Times*, "Nigeria's Economic Shock Plan on Trial," March 18, 2026; *The Economist*, "Nigeria's Economy May Be Back from the Brink," January 29, 2026; *Deutsche Welle* (DW), "'Barely Surviving': Life in Nigeria's Cost-of-Living Crisis," January 20, 2026; and Afrobarometer, "Nigeria Round 10 Summary of Results," August 7, 2025.

²² Associated Press (AP), "Nigeria Charges 6 with Treason over Alleged Coup Plot," April 21, 2026.

²³ See for example annual State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*.

²⁴ Freedom House, *Freedom in the World 2025*. See also Reporters Without Borders, *2025 Press Freedom Index*.

²⁵ CIVICUS, *CIVICUS Monitor 2025*. See also reporting by the Committee to Protect Journalists, International Press Centre, Media Rights Agenda, and the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development.

²⁶ On divisions, see for example *The Africa Report*, "Nigeria PDP Crisis: Wike Camp Gains Edge After INEC-Backed Meet," March 30, 2026; *Africa Confidential*, "Tinubu Hollows Out the Opposition," March 20, 2026.

²⁷ On patterns of corruption in Nigeria, see Matthew T. Page, *A New Taxonomy for Corruption in Nigeria*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018. On impact, see Chatham House, "Corruption in Nigeria," August 28, 2025.

²⁸ See for example Afrobarometer, "Nigerians Say Corruption Is Worsening, and Citizens Risk Retaliation If They Speak Up, Afrobarometer Survey Finds," May 6, 2025.

U.S. Kleptocracy Recovery Efforts

The U.S. Government has seized proceeds from corruption in Nigeria that were located in or laundered through the United States, and has taken steps to repatriate such funds for the benefit of the Nigerian people. U.S. attention long focused on assets acquired by former military leader Sani Abacha and his associates, who embezzled billions of dollars in public funds during Abacha's rule in the 1990s. In 2013, the Department of Justice (DOJ) filed a civil forfeiture suit against over \$625 million in assets belonging to Abacha and his associates, and pursuant to that suit, DOJ seized roughly \$480 million laundered through U.S. banks and stored in multiple jurisdictions.²⁹ Over \$300 million was repatriated to Nigeria during the first Trump Administration. DOJ has also seized assets related to more recent corruption and money laundering by other Nigerian politicians. At the end of President Joe Biden's term, the Justice Department announced a deal to transfer almost \$53 million in forfeited assets to Nigeria in recognition of its "assistance to the department in an investigation into corruption in the Nigerian oil industry."³⁰ Under the deal, most of the funds were dedicated to a program under World Bank oversight intended to increase electricity access with renewable energy, and the remainder were to be used to build the capacity of the criminal justice sector, including through activities to counter terrorist financing.

The Economy

Nigeria was Africa's largest economy for over a decade, but currency devaluations lowered its gross domestic product (GDP) in 2023-2024, and it now ranks third, after South Africa and Egypt, per the IMF. Its oil sector, discussed below, has been the largest source of government revenue since large-scale production began in the 1970s. Oil dependence has shaped Nigeria's politics and economy. Hydrocarbons account for over 80% of export earnings, but the agriculture and services sectors collectively account for a much larger share of GDP and employment.

The non-oil economy is large and dynamic, driven by a burgeoning services sector and a growing population. Lagos, Nigeria's commercial capital, has a population and GDP larger than many African countries. Its film industry, "Nollywood," is second to only India's Bollywood in annual output.³¹ Many investors appear to view Nigeria as a potentially lucrative consumer market for telecommunications, financial services, retail trade, and other industries.³² Tinubu's liberalization of the foreign exchange market has reportedly improved the investment climate.³³ The Financial Action Task Force removed Nigeria from its watchlist of countries with gaps in their anti-money laundering and counterterrorist financing regimes in 2025, noting major progress since 2023.

Nigeria's agriculture sector is central to the economy, and it was a focus of U.S. development aid prior to the Trump Administration's foreign aid cuts (see "U.S. Assistance"). The sector is the country's leading employer and contributes almost a quarter of annual GDP.³⁴ Top export crops include cocoa beans and their derivatives, sesame seeds, cashew nuts, and shea oil. Nigeria's livestock industry is one of the largest in Africa. The agriculture sector faces systemic challenges

²⁹ Department of Justice (DOJ), "U.S. Forfeits Over \$480 Million Stolen by Former Nigerian Dictator in Largest Forfeiture Ever Obtained Through a Kleptocracy Action," August 7, 2014; "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; and "United States Repatriates Over \$20 Million in Assets Stolen by Former Nigerian Dictator," November 17, 2022.

³⁰ DOJ, "United States Enters into Agreement with Nigeria to Transfer \$52.88M in Forfeited Corruption Proceeds for Uses to Benefit the Nigerian People," January 10, 2025.

³¹ International Trade Administration (ITA), "Media and Entertainment," *Nigeria Country Commercial Guide*, 2025.

³² On challenges and opportunities for investors, see ITA, "Nigeria Country Commercial Guide," State Department, *2025 Investment Climate Statement: Nigeria*; *Financial Times*, "Special Report: Investing in Nigeria," a collection of articles available at <https://www.ft.com/reports/investing-in-nigeria>.

³³ AP, "Nigeria Lets Market Set Currency Exchange Rate to Stabilize Economy, Woo Investors," June 15, 2023.

³⁴ ITA, *Nigeria Country Commercial Guide*.

that hinder productivity, including high input costs, limited mechanization, poor infrastructure, insecurity, climate change, land degradation, and limited access to credit.³⁵

Development Challenges

Nigeria faces stark development challenges, and a wide gap between rich and poor. Per the World Bank, over half the population lives in poverty and the share of Nigerians in extreme poverty rose from under 35% before the COVID pandemic to almost 42% in 2022/23.³⁶ The pandemic, natural disasters, supply chain disruptions from Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and growing insecurity have all contributed to rising poverty, and the recent economic reforms have eroded Nigerians' purchasing power. Poverty rates are significantly higher in the north, which has lower literacy rates, fewer schools, lower school enrollment, and higher fertility rates than the south.³⁷

Service provision is limited both in rural and urban areas: roughly 60 million Nigerians lack access to basic drinking water services and 80 million lack access to improved sanitation.³⁸ Nigeria has the world's largest population living without access to electricity: almost 90 million people.³⁹ Despite some improvements in health indicators, immense challenges remain: infant and maternal mortality rates have declined, but remain among the worst globally.⁴⁰ Nigeria has the world's highest malaria burden and accounts for almost a third of malaria deaths globally. It also has one of the world's largest populations living with HIV and one of the highest rates of mother-to-child HIV transmission. Nigeria ranks 147th of 167 countries on the 2025 Sustainable Development Goals Index and 164th of 192 countries on the Human Development Index.⁴¹

Studies have examined factors constraining Nigeria's economic potential and sought to explain the apparent contradiction between its vast human and natural resources and its poor development indicators. Many analyses focus on problems arising from Nigeria's economic dependence on oil and gas, such as vulnerability to oil price swings and boom-bust cycles; some note challenges to efficient oil sector management in a political system in which authorities face pressures to capture and distribute oil wealth.⁴² Corruption is often cited as a factor. Efforts to spur non-oil industries via import restrictions, foreign exchange controls, and other protectionist policies appear to have had limited success in fostering diversification. Many Nigerians are engaged in low-paying informal work such as subsistence agriculture or petty trading, and the World Bank has noted that "the wage jobs best able to lift people out of poverty are rare and unevenly distributed in Nigeria; most poor Nigerians hold household farm and non-farm jobs that cannot translate their hard work

³⁵ ITA, *Nigeria Country Commercial Guide*; UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), "Nigeria at a Glance."

³⁶ World Bank, "Poverty & Equity Brief," October 2025.

³⁷ World Bank, "Poverty & Equity Brief"; Center for Global Development (CGD), "Poverty in Nigeria: Understanding and Bridging the Divide Between North and South," 2018; Think Global Health, "Poverty's Albatross—Nigeria in Mid-Century," 2020; and *The Economist*, "Why the Fertility Gap Between North and South Nigeria Matters."

³⁸ World Bank, "Nigeria: Ensuring Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for All," May 26, 2021.

³⁹ World Bank, *Tracking SDG7: The Energy Progress Report 2025*, June 2025. See also *The Economist*, "Nigeria Has More People Without Electricity Than Any Other Country," May 8, 2025.

⁴⁰ Health data herein draws from UNICEF, *Maternal, Newborn and Child Health—Regional Snapshot: West and Central Africa Region 2025*; BBC, "One Death Every Seven Minutes: The World's Worst Country to Give Birth," June 3, 2025; World Health Organization, *World Malaria Report 2025*, December 4, 2025, and "HIV Country Profile—Nigeria."

⁴¹ UN, *Sustainable Development Report 2025*; UN Development Program (UNDP), *2025 Human Development Report*.

⁴² See for example IMF, "Diversification of the Nigerian Economy," July 23, 2025; 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* (2018); Jacob Augustine et al., "The Economic Cost of Corruption in Nigeria (2019-2025): A Critical Review," *Socio Economy and Policy Studies*, February 2026.

into an exit from poverty.”⁴³ Barriers to quality employment are reportedly more pronounced for women, and Nigeria ranks poorly on youth employment opportunities.⁴⁴

The Oil and Gas Sector

Nigeria is Africa’s largest oil producer and was the world’s 6th largest exporter of liquified natural gas (LNG) in 2024.⁴⁵ Oil and gas are the most important contributors to government revenues, though they have accounted for a declining share of state earnings since the 2000s. U.S. firms Chevron and ExxonMobil are among the largest international oil companies (IOCs) active in the sector, alongside Anglo-Dutch firm Shell (the leading IOC in Nigeria), French firm Total, and Italian firm Eni. Some IOCs have sought to sell their onshore and shallow-water assets, a trend analysts attribute to high costs associated with aging pipelines, oil theft and sabotage, risks of litigation for oil spills, and IOC efforts to reduce emissions.⁴⁶ Exxon sold its onshore and shallow-water holdings in 2024, for example, but continues to invest in Nigeria’s deepwater fields.⁴⁷

Decades of pipeline spills have caused extensive environmental damage and devastated livelihoods and health conditions in the oil-rich Niger Delta.⁴⁸ Shell, which has faced lawsuits in European courts, agreed in 2022 to pay almost \$16 million to Delta communities affected by oil spills, after offering over \$83 million in compensation in 2008. A UN panel assessed in 2025 that repeated oil spills in the Delta are human rights violations and that the divestment efforts of four IOCs, including Exxon, do not absolve them of responsibility for past actions.⁴⁹

Nigeria’s oil output, hindered by underinvestment, aging infrastructure, operational inefficiencies, and security problems, has yet to return to pre-pandemic levels, despite a major decline in oil theft.⁵⁰ The country, a member of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), has struggled to meet its OPEC quota since 2020, but production is rising: Nigeria met its quota of 1.5 million barrels per day (bpd) for the first time in mid-2025 and again in May 2026.

Nigeria has also grappled, until recently, with limited refining capacity: it was both Africa’s largest oil producer *and* its largest refined fuel importer until 2025.⁵¹ The new Dangote Refinery in Lagos, developed by Nigerian business magnate Aliko Dangote, aims to reduce the country’s reliance on imports of refined fuel. With the capacity to process 650,000 bpd, it is Africa’s largest refinery. While 75% of its production is reserved for domestic consumption, the refinery began exporting gasoline to West African countries in late 2024 and exported its first cargo to Asia in 2025. The refinery reached full operating capacity in early 2026 and now meets over two-thirds of Nigeria’s estimated daily demand. It could reportedly meet all domestic demand and produce fuel for export, but the refinery has been unable to secure enough domestic crude. As a result,

⁴³ World Bank, *Nigeria Poverty Assessment 2022*.

⁴⁴ Nigeria National Bureau of Statistics, *National Labor Force Surveys*; McKinsey & Company, “Women in the Workplace 2025: India, Nigeria, and Kenya,” May 15, 2025; Commonwealth, *Global Youth Development Index*, 2024.

⁴⁵ U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), most recent available data as of June 2026.

⁴⁶ Stakeholder Democracy Network (SDN), *Divesting from the Delta: Implications for the Niger Delta as International Oil Companies Exit Onshore Production*, 2021.

⁴⁷ Reuters, “Exxon Plans \$1.5 Billion Investment in Nigerian Oilfield,” May 7, 2025.

⁴⁸ *The Guardian*, “‘This Place Used to Be Green’: The Brutal Impact of Oil in the Niger Delta,” December 6, 2019; LSE Business Review, “How the Oil Industry Is Damaging Food Production in Nigeria’s Niger Delta,” 2024.

⁴⁹ *Semafor*, “Oil Companies’ Divestment Breached Human Rights in Nigeria, UN Experts Say,” September 1, 2025.

⁵⁰ EIA, “Nigeria Was the Top Crude Oil Producer in Africa, but Disruptions Threaten Production,” June 15, 2023; S&P Global, “Nigeria Oil Theft at 16-Year Low, but Challenges Remain: Officials,” September 12, 2025.

⁵¹ *Bloomberg*, “Dangote Ends Nigeria’s Run as Africa’s Biggest Fuel Importer,” May 28, 2025.

Nigeria still imports some crude oil from other countries, including the United States, which was a net crude oil exporter to Nigeria for the first time in early 2025.⁵²

As oil disruptions linked to the Iran conflict have raised global fuel prices, Nigeria, like other countries, is exposed to global price shocks. Nigeria has no strategic fuel reserve, and, given its oil production constraints, domestic fuel prices have spiked. In April 2026, Nigerians faced the highest fuel prices they had ever paid. Many other countries in the region have implemented price controls, but the Tinubu Administration, having removed fuel subsidies, has asserted it will not interfere in fuel prices.⁵³ Higher fuel prices have increased transport costs, which in turn increases food prices. The fuel situation adds pressure on Nigeria to increase its oil production: in March 2026, it was one of only two OPEC producers, along with Venezuela, able to boost output.⁵⁴

Economic Trends and Outlook

The IMF projects that Nigeria's GDP will grow 4.06% in 2026.⁵⁵ Per the IMF, the government's reforms have improved macroeconomic stability, enhanced resilience, and strengthened investor confidence.⁵⁶ Inflation, which peaked near 35% in 2024 before easing to an average around 23% in 2025, fell to 15% in early 2026, before the oil shock related to the Iran conflict.⁵⁷ The resulting spike in fuel prices prompted the government to reduce tariffs on food, vehicles, and industrial inputs to ease cost pressures.⁵⁸ Nigeria may be better placed than many countries to weather global shocks from the Iran conflict.⁵⁹ Security challenges and structural deficiencies still constrain GDP growth, but the rise in global oil prices is expected to boost Nigeria's oil export revenue and foreign exchange inflows, even as it increases the cost of living for Nigerians.

The IMF assesses that Nigeria faces a moderate risk of sovereign debt stress. Its debt-to-GDP ratio dropped from 53% in 2024 to 32% in 2026, largely due to the rebasing of the economy. As 2026 began, Nigeria owed 46% of its nearly \$52 billion external debt to multilateral lenders, led by the World Bank; 36% to commercial lenders; and 13% to bilateral lenders, led by China's Ex-Im Bank (\$5 billion).⁶⁰ Nigeria is set to spend \$11.6 billion, nearly half its government revenue, in 2026 serving its debt. The country has one of the world's lowest government revenue-to-GDP ratios and has struggled to collect taxes outside of the oil and gas sector; Tinubu's government is implementing a new tax regime that centralizes tax collection to boost revenue.⁶¹

U.S.-Nigeria Trade and Investment

Nigeria has routinely been the United States' second-largest trade partner in Africa (after South Africa), and it is the second-largest destination for U.S. foreign direct investment (FDI) on the

⁵² EIA, "In February and March, the United States Was a Net Exporter of Crude Oil to Nigeria," July 22, 2025; *Business Insider Africa*, "Dangote's \$20B Refinery Sources U.S. Crude, Raising Questions on Nigeria's Output," June 7, 2025.

⁵³ Reuters, "Nigeria's Giant Oil Refinery Fails to Prevent Record Gas Prices," March 30, 2026.

⁵⁴ Reuters, "OPEC Oil Output Plunges in March as War Forces Export Cuts, Reuters Survey Finds," April 1, 2026.

⁵⁵ IMF, World Economic Outlook database, accessed April 2026.

⁵⁶ IMF, *2025 Article IV Consultation Staff Report*, June 2026.

⁵⁷ Inflation rates as reported by the Central Bank of Nigeria at <https://www.cbn.gov.ng/rates/inflrates.html>.

⁵⁸ Reuters, "Nigeria to Cut Import Duties on Food, Vehicles, to Curb Inflation," April 14, 2026.

⁵⁹ Economist Intelligence Unit, "Nigeria Well Placed to Weather Global Strains," March 24, 2026; World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update*, April 2026.

⁶⁰ Nigeria Debt Management Office, "Nigeria External Debt Stock as at December 31, 2025."

⁶¹ OECD, *Revenue Statistics in Africa*, 2025.

continent after Egypt.⁶² Bilateral goods trade rose from \$10 billion in 2024 to nearly \$11.8 billion in 2025, with U.S. exports of goods to Nigeria approaching \$6.8 billion and almost \$5 billion in imports from Nigeria, resulting in a goods trade surplus for the United States of \$1.8 billion.⁶³

Nigeria was among the top five sources of U.S. crude oil imports until the U.S. demand for oil imports declined in the early 2010s with the increase of domestic production. It was the 8th largest source of U.S. petroleum imports in 2025.⁶⁴ Nigeria has been the leading exporter to the United States under the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA, P.L. 106-200, as amended) trade preference program, with crude oil accounting for nearly all of its AGOA-eligible exports. AGOA expired on September 30, 2025; Congress reauthorized it in February 2026 through the end of the year and made benefits retroactive.⁶⁵ Under President Trump's April 2025 tariff action, Nigeria faced a 15% tariff on exports to the United States, although petroleum products have been exempt from the President's tariffs.⁶⁶ A February 2026 U.S. Supreme Court ruling invalidated the April 2025 tariffs, but the President imposed temporary tariffs under a different statute, leaving Nigeria with a 10% tariff on some exports.⁶⁷ AGOA's reauthorization does not override this duty.

U.S. direct investment in Nigeria was estimated at \$7.9 billion in 2024 (latest available), up by more than 25% from 2023. U.S. investment in Nigeria has historically been concentrated in the oil and gas sector, though the share of extractives in U.S. FDI has declined amid U.S. investment in other sectors, such as services.⁶⁸ Corruption remains a substantial barrier to trade and investment in Nigeria, according to U.S. government reports; U.S. companies have expressed concern about corruption and a lack of transparency in procurement processes in the country.⁶⁹

Security Challenges

This section provides an overview of select security issues in Nigeria that have drawn attention from Members of Congress and other U.S. policymakers. Some general trends may be observed:

Nigeria's security problems have multiplied. Many Nigerians identified security challenges as the top issue facing the country before the last elections, and by some indicators those challenges have since worsened.⁷⁰ Nigeria has long struggled with organized crime, including drug and

⁶² U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Nigeria—International Trade and Investment Country Facts."

⁶³ U.S. Census Bureau, "Trade in Goods with Nigeria."

⁶⁴ EIA, "Petroleum & Other Liquids—U.S. Imports by Country of Origin."

⁶⁵ AGOA was reauthorized in Div. I, §5019, of the FY2026 Consolidated Appropriations Act (P.L. 119-75).

⁶⁶ White House, "Regulating Imports with a Reciprocal Tariff to Rectify Trade Practices that Contribute to Large and Persistent Annual United States Goods Trade Deficits," April 2, 2025.

⁶⁷ White House, "Fact Sheet: President Donald J. Trump Imposes a Temporary Import Duty to Address Fundamental International Payment Problems," February 20, 2026. See also CRS In Focus IF13199, *Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974*, by Christopher A. Casey, Danielle M. Trachtenberg, and Christopher T. Zirpoli; and CRS Legal Sidebar LSB11398, *Supreme Court Rules Against Tariffs Imposed Under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA)*, by Christopher T. Zirpoli.

⁶⁸ U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, "United States and Nigeria Deepen Trade Ties, Expand Opportunities for Private Sector-Led Growth Under Commercial and Investment Partnership Framework," January 30, 2026.

⁶⁹ U.S. Trade Representative, *2026 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers*, March 31, 2026.

⁷⁰ *New York Times* (NYT), "Ahead of Crucial Election, Security Crises and Kidnappings Plague Nigeria," February 24, 2023; VOA, "Nigeria Civil Society Coalition Demands Accountability over Insecurity," January 31, 2024. See also ACSS, "Delivering on Nigerians' Demands for Security," June 5, 2025, "Violent Criminal Gangs Displace and Disrupt North West Nigeria," October 21, 2024, and "The Widening Scope of Africa's Militant Islamist Threat," April 6, 2026.

human trafficking, maritime crime (piracy), cybercrime, and kidnappings.⁷¹ Criminal gangs in the northwest, often referred to as bandits, are an escalating threat. A trend of mass kidnappings, some linked to criminal groups and others linked to jihadists, adds to perceptions of insecurity.⁷²

Security forces are under strain. Nigeria has struggled for over 15 years to counter the evolving threat posed by Islamist extremists, and its forces are strained by overlapping security challenges. By many accounts, the military and police are overstretched and under-resourced, and the use of the military across the country for law enforcement tasks has added to the problem.⁷³ Under Buhari and Tinubu, the government has increased defense spending and added ground and air assets to expand military capabilities, but the military still struggles to secure areas retaken from militants, and many of Nigeria's security problems may ultimately require political solutions.⁷⁴

Law enforcement agencies' efforts to combat banditry and other organized crime have been hampered by inadequate funding, understaffing, poor intelligence gathering, insufficient training, weak interagency coordination, and corruption.⁷⁵ Porous borders, political interference, and community mistrust further undermine police effectiveness, leading many communities to look to vigilante groups, which vary in size and state backing, for security.⁷⁶ Some vigilante groups have been implicated in serious abuses, including killings, which have spurred cycles of revenge.⁷⁷

Security forces have committed extensive abuses. Nigerian forces have been implicated in serious human rights abuses, including extrajudicial killings and torture, and the State Department has described impunity as a problem.⁷⁸ Human rights groups have reported widespread abuses in the military's counterinsurgency operations and estimate that thousands have died in military custody since 2011.⁷⁹ Press reports suggest Nigeria's army ran a forced abortion program in the northeast for female detainees who had been impregnated by Islamist insurgents.⁸⁰ Human rights advocates raised alarm in early 2026 over the military's alleged arbitrary detention of 1,500 displaced Fulani pastoralists and the reported deaths of at least 150 people, most of them children,

⁷¹ For more, see UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), *Organized Crime in Nigeria: A Threat Assessment*, 2022; ACSS, "Black Axe—Nigeria's Most Notorious Transnational Criminal Organization," October 29, 2024; and *Financial Times*, "How Kidnapping Became a Lucrative Business in Nigeria," October 23, 2025.

⁷² Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime (GI-TOC), "What Does the Recent Escalation of Mass Abductions in Nigeria Tell Us?" March 15, 2025; UN News, "Nigeria: Hundreds Abducted in the North as Insurgent Attacks Rise," November 25, 2025.

⁷³ HumAngle, "Inside the Nigerian military's Quiet Gains Against a Fragmented War," May 2, 2026; The Conversation, "Nigeria's Use of Soldiers for Civilian Tasks Comes with Serious Costs," September 9, 2025; ACCORD, "Mutiny as Dialogue: Interrogating the Rank-and-File Complaints and Revolt in the Nigerian Counter-Insurgency Campaign," 2023.

⁷⁴ AP, "Boko Haram's Resurgence: Why Nigeria's Military Is Struggling to Hold the Line," May 26, 2025.

⁷⁵ ACCORD, "Fighting from the Bottom Up: Community Mobilisation as a Viable Strategy in Combating Banditry in Nigeria," 2023; *The Round Table*, "Why the Nigerian Police Struggles to Tackle Banditry in Nigeria," June 23, 2025.

⁷⁶ International Crisis Group (ICG), *Managing Vigilantism in Nigeria: A Near-Term Necessity*, April 12, 2022.

⁷⁷ DW, "Are Nigeria's Vigilantes as Bad as Bandits They're Chasing?" March 22, 2024; HumAngle, "Terror from the Trolls: The Ethnic Divide, Revenge Killings Behind Nigeria's Christmas Massacre," August 30, 2024; *The New Humanitarian* (TNH), "'Everyone Knows Somebody Who Has Been Kidnapped': Inside Nigeria's Banditry Epidemic," January 30, 2023; and ICG, *Violence in Nigeria's North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, May 18, 2020.

⁷⁸ See the State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* and reports by Human Rights Watch (HRW) and Amnesty, including Amnesty, "Nigeria: Accountability for Human Rights Violations Remains Elusive," July 2023.

⁷⁹ Reuters, "Smothered, Poisoned and Shot," December 12, 2022 and "The Abortion Assault," December 7, 2022; Amnesty, "If You See It, You Will Cry": Life and Death in Giwa Barracks, 2016; HRW, "They Didn't Know if I Was Alive or Dead": Military Detention of Children for Suspected Boko Haram Involvement in Northeast Nigeria, 2019.

⁸⁰ Reuters, "More Women Describe Enduring Forced Abortions in Nigerian Army Programme," April 19, 2023.

in Kwara State.⁸¹ The military has also drawn repeated criticism for airstrikes resulting in civilian casualties and limited accountability: in 2017, for example, the air force bombed a displaced persons camp, killing over 70, including aid workers, and in 2023, the military mistakenly killed 85 in drone strikes on a religious celebration.⁸² Strikes targeting bandits reportedly killed villagers in 2024 and 2025, and two strikes in early 2026 on villages that the military termed terrorist enclaves each reportedly killed over 100 people, including women and children.⁸³

Nigerian security forces have been repeatedly implicated in using excessive force during protests. In 2024, the ECOWAS Court of Justice, based in Abuja, ruled that the Nigerian government was responsible for human rights violations during a lethal 2020 crackdown on protests against police brutality. The crackdown, which involved police and soldiers, had drawn congressional concern.⁸⁴

Impunity is widespread; corruption is a key challenge. Perceptions of injustice and limited accountability are often cited as core problems driving insecurity.⁸⁵ Perpetrators of violence often elude prosecution, per State Department reports, and when authorities do intervene after episodes of violence, security forces have sometimes been implicated in arbitrary mass arrests.⁸⁶ Opinion polls suggest Nigerians widely view the police as the country's most corrupt institution, but corruption also reportedly plagues the military.⁸⁷ Procurement fraud, embezzlement, and other forms of corruption have drained defense resources and transparency in defense governance is limited; off-budget expenditures have allegedly been common.⁸⁸

⁸¹ Amnesty, "Authorities Must Investigate Deaths of at Least 150 Fulani People in Military Camp," April 30, 2026.

⁸² *NYT*, "Errant Airstrikes by Nigeria's Military Have Killed Worshipers, Herders and Refugees," December 12, 2023; BBC, "A Father's Grief After Daughter Killed in Accidental Drone Strike," December 2, 2024; and HRW, "Nigeria Airstrike Victims Need Justice," December 5, 2024.

⁸³ HRW, "Another Erroneous Airstrike Claims Lives in Nigeria," January 13, 2025; *Washington Post*, "Airstrike by Nigeria, US Ally Against Islamist Militants, Kills Scores," April 16, 2026; *NYT*, "Nigerian Military Accused of War Crimes After Deadly Market Airstrikes," May 12, 2026.

⁸⁴ The 2020 protest movement, known as #EndSARS, called for the disbandment of the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), a police unit long implicated in abuses. In the 117th Congress, some Members expressed support for the protests and called for accountability for Nigerian police abuses, including in H.Res. 235. CNN, "Nigeria's Government Found Guilty of Human Rights Abuses During the #EndSARS Protests," July 12, 2024.

⁸⁵ See for example Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), "Nigerian Violence and Impunity," February 7, 2017; Centre for Democracy and Development, *Multiple Nodes, Common Causes: National Stocktake of Contemporary Insecurity and State Responses in Nigeria*, March 2022.

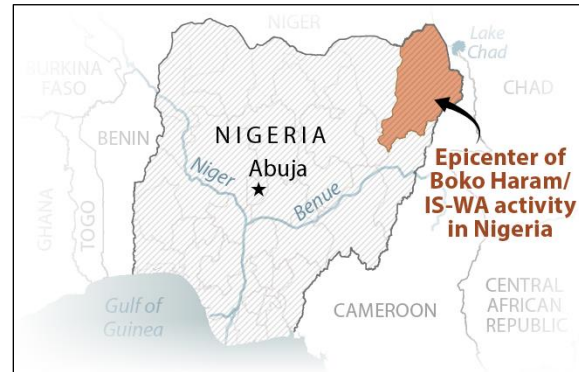
⁸⁶ State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices* have consistently highlighted arbitrary arrests.

⁸⁷ See e.g., Afrobarometer, "Nigerians Say Corruption Is Worsening," May 6, 2025.

⁸⁸ Transparency International (TI), "Nigeria's Defense Sector: Persistent Corruption Risk Amidst Escalating Security Threats," July 2024.

Militant Islamist Groups

Jama'at Ahlis Sunna Lidda'awati wal Jihad (JAS)—more commonly known as Boko Haram, which roughly translates to “Western culture is forbidden”—was founded in the early 2000s as a Salafist reform movement, and evolved from 2009 on into one of the world’s deadliest extremist groups. It gained notoriety for its brutal tactics, such as the use of women and children as suicide bombers, and for its 2014 kidnapping of schoolgirls from Chibok, in northeast Borno State.



After Boko Haram pledged allegiance to the Islamic State in 2015, a leadership dispute fractured the group and a splinter faction gained the Islamic State’s recognition as its West Africa Province (IS-WA, or ISWAP) in 2016. Longtime Boko Haram leader Abubakar Shekau committed suicide in 2021 during an IS-WA siege, and thousands of Boko Haram fighters and non-combatants living in its strongholds surrendered to Nigerian authorities. IS-WA and JAS, as many experts refer to Boko Haram elements who remained with Shekau after the 2016 split, operate primarily in the northeast and border areas of neighboring countries. Both groups also have cells in northwest and central Nigeria, where Ansaru, a smaller faction aligned with Al Qaeda, also operates.⁸⁹

IS-WA has eclipsed JAS as the leading militant Islamist group in the Lake Chad Basin region (comprising border areas of Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon, and Niger), fighting both the region’s militaries and JAS to expand its territory and raise its profile.⁹⁰ With an influx of foreign fighters since 2024, IS-WA may have as many as 12,000 members.⁹¹ Trainers from the Middle East have reportedly helped improve its operational capacity, and the group recruits and trains fighters for other IS affiliates and collaborates with the Sahel branch (IS-Sahel) on IS propaganda, per UN monitors. The Islamic State’s Nigeria-based Al Furqan office, part of the network’s General Directorate of Provinces (IS GDP), oversees the IS branches in West Africa and the Sahel and gains much of its revenue through criminal activities, including kidnappings.⁹² Reports suggest that the head of Al Furqan, a senior IS-WA leader known as Abu Bilal al Mainuki, may have assumed a more prominent role in IS global leadership, possibly as head of the IS GDP, in 2025.⁹³ Mainuki was reportedly killed in a joint operation by U.S. and Nigerian forces in May 2026.

⁸⁹ Hudson Institute, “A ‘Sahelian’ or a ‘Littoral’ Crisis? Examining the Widening of Nigeria’s Boko Haram Conflict,” April 2023; *CTC Sentinel*, “Kachallas and Kinship: Understanding Jihadist Expansion and Diffusion in Nigeria,” January 2026; ISS, “How a Boko Haram Faction Entrenched Itself near Nigeria’s Capital,” July 29, 2025; and *Premium Times*, “Tracing Al-Qaeda’s Footprints in Nigeria: From War-Torn Sahel to Nigeria’s Forest Reserves,” August 20, 2025.

⁹⁰ ICG, *JAS vs. ISWAP: The War of the Boko Haram Splinters*, March 28, 2024; Hudson Institute, “Boko Haram 2.0? The Evolution of a Jihadist Group Since 2015,” July 7, 2025; and *The Africa Report*, “‘Winner Will Decide Our Future’: Lake Chad Basin Caught in Brutal Boko Haram-ISWAP Struggle,” November 24, 2025.

⁹¹ UN, *Thirty-Sixth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2734 (2024)* (hereinafter “UN Monitoring Team”), July 24, 2025, S/2025/482.

⁹² Treasury Dept., *Fact Sheet on ISIS Financing*, August 8, 2024; Global Network on Extremism and Technology (GNET), “Combating Islamic State Finance: West Africa and the Sahel,” February 2025. On IS-GDP, see *CTC Sentinel*, “The General Directorate of Provinces: Managing the Islamic State’s Global Network,” July 2023.

⁹³ UN Monitoring Team report, February 4, 2026, S/2026/44. For more on Mainuki, see, e.g., HumAngle, “Abu Bilal Al-Minuki: The Terrorist Who Died Twice,” May 17, 2026.

In 2025, Nigeria experienced its deadliest year from jihadist violence since Boko Haram's height in 2014-2015.⁹⁴ Attacks by both IS-WA and JAS surged.⁹⁵ By some counts, IS-WA led over 500 attacks in 2025, including several drone attacks, and its fighters reportedly overran over a dozen military bases.⁹⁶ JAS reportedly remains more deadly in terms of violence against civilians.⁹⁷

Beyond IS-WA and JAS, Sahel-based jihadist groups have expanded operations into northern parts of West Africa's coastal states, including northwest Nigeria.⁹⁸ Some militants from the Sahel reportedly moved into remote parts of Sokoto State along the Nigeria-Niger border. Referred to by locals as "Lakurawa" ("recruits"), Nigerian authorities came to see them as a growing threat by 2024 and designated them as a terrorist group in early 2025. Per UN monitors, the Lakurawa group has reportedly pledged allegiance to the Islamic State's Sahel branch (IS-Sahel), but UN monitors and independent analysts note that not all of those whom Nigerians refer to as Lakurawa are members of the group.⁹⁹ The term Lakurawa seems to be applied to an array of armed groups operating in the northwest, including not only the IS-linked militants but also militants associated with Al Qaeda's Sahel affiliate, Jama'at Nusrat al Islam wal Muslimin (JNIM), which has been increasingly active on the Benin-Nigeria border. JNIM conducted its first attack in Nigeria in October 2025, in Kwara State, which has faced growing jihadist activity since 2024. Multiple groups reportedly have a presence in Kainji Lake National Park, which spans Kwara and Niger States, including JNIM, JAS, Ansaru, and the Lakurawa, elevating concern about an extremist push into the southwest.¹⁰⁰

Rural Insecurity: Farmer-Herder Conflict and Banditry

Rural violence in the northwest and central "Middle Belt" regions has increased in the past fifteen years.¹⁰¹ Conflict between farmers and herders has risen amid an expansion of organized crime, and jihadists have also expanded their reach in these areas.

Analysis of land use in the Middle Belt since 1975 shows a major expansion of cultivated land and decline in open grazing areas.¹⁰² As socioeconomic, political, demographic, and



⁹⁴ ACSS, "The Widening Scope of Africa's Militant Islamist Threat," April 6, 2026.

⁹⁵ Good Governance Africa (GGA), "Unseen Advances, Quiet Offensives: ISWAP's Strategic Resurgence and the Limits of Nigeria's Military Response," July 22, 2025; Italian Institute for International Political Studies, "'Burn the Camps': Jihadist Resurgence in the Lake Chad Basin," July 16, 2025.

⁹⁶ UN Monitoring Team report, February 4, 2026, S/2026/44. See also GGA, *Lakurawa: From Transnational Jihadist Insertion in Northeast Nigeria to Criminal Predatory Governance in Northwest Nigeria*, May 2026.

⁹⁷ Hudson Institute, "Boko Haram 2.0?"; Good Governance Africa, "Unseen Advances, Quiet Offensives."

⁹⁸ See Hudson Institute, "A 'Sahelian' or a 'Littoral' Crisis?"; CTC Sentinel, "Kachallas and Kinship;" ICG, *Understanding JNIM's Expansion Beyond the Sahel*, February 20, 2026; AEI Critical Threats, "Salafi-Jihadi Areas of Operation in West Africa Interactive Map and Campaign Analysis," November 2025.

⁹⁹ UN Monitoring Team, S/2025/482; Jihadology, "Who Are Nigeria's 'Newest' Jihadist Militants?" October 15, 2025.

¹⁰⁰ *The Africa Report*, "'Conquest Mode': The Jihadist Push for Nigeria's Southern Heartland," February 17, 2026; HumAngle, "Kainji Lake and the Dangerous Redrawing of Nigeria's Security Map," February 18, 2026.

¹⁰¹ The Middle Belt is an unofficial, variously defined area, and there is debate over which states it includes. This CRS map graphic is not intended to authoritatively demarcate it.

¹⁰² Danish Institute of International Studies (DIIS), *Battle for the Bush: Banditry and Violent Agrarian Change in Northwest Nigeria*, August 2025; Reuters, "Nomads and farmers in Fight for Nigeria's Heartland," December 19, 2018.

ecological trends have reduced the compatibility of pastoral and farming livelihoods and raised the stakes of competition for resources, conflict between pastoralist and farming communities has intensified.¹⁰³ Shifts in land ownership and grazing limits have fueled pastoralist grievances. Population growth, changing rainfall patterns, environmental degradation, banditry, cattle rustling, and Boko Haram attacks have pushed many herders south.¹⁰⁴

Farmer-herder clashes in the northwest have typically involved ethnic Fulani herders and ethnic Hausa farmers, two largely Muslim groups. In central Nigeria, the violence is more often between Fulani herders and sedentary communities of various ethnic groups, many of whom are Christian. These conflicts often reflect tensions between “indigenes”—ethnic minorities recognized by a state as native to an area and afforded preferential access to land, education, public jobs, and political appointments—and “non-indigenes,” who are considered settlers regardless of length of residency and sometimes subject to discrimination.¹⁰⁵ In much of central Nigeria, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, and Fulani are treated as settlers, even if their family has lived in an area for generations.

Reports suggest authorities rarely arrest perpetrators in intercommunal clashes, and impunity has spurred vigilantism and reprisal killings.¹⁰⁶ As the violence has risen, ethnic militias and vigilante groups have mobilized, and revenge attacks further blur the lines between conflict drivers.¹⁰⁷ Polarizing narratives and hate speech have increased, notably against the Fulani, a diverse, traditionally nomadic and pastoralist ethnic group that spans West Africa.¹⁰⁸ Some Nigerians have called the Fulani “terrorists” and accused them of a plot to Islamize Nigeria (see “Religious Persecution and Conflict” below). Some reports suggest that Fulani stigmatization has contributed to ethnoreligious violence in Nigeria, and may push some Fulani into militancy or criminality.¹⁰⁹

Banditry has become a major security concern. Analysts link its rise to years of deteriorating political, economic, and security conditions in the northwest, and to increasingly lethal cattle rustling—fueled by small arms proliferation after the 2011 collapse of Libya—which drove a cycle of escalating violence.¹¹⁰ The bandit problem is related to farmer-herder conflict: Fulani groups formed in the early 2010s to defend against Hausa vigilante attacks became increasingly involved in cattle rustling and later kidnapping for ransom.¹¹¹ Many, but not all, so-called bandits

¹⁰³ ACSS, “The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa,” 2021; Search for Common Ground (SFCG), *Pastoralism and Conflict in the Sudano-Sahel: A Review of the Literature*, 2020; and ICG, *Herders Against Farmers: Nigeria’s Expanding Deadly Conflict*, 2017.

¹⁰⁴ ICG, *Herders Against Farmers*; ICG, *Violence in Nigeria’s North West: Rolling Back the Mayhem*, 2020; GITOC, *Driving Destruction: Cattle Rustling and Instability in Nigeria*, 2023; Conversation, “How Nigeria’s Grazing Law Also Shapes Land Divisions and Violence,” November 11, 2025.

¹⁰⁵ For more on the indigene issue, see ICG, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (I): The Jos Crisis*, 2012; U.S. Institute of Peace (USIP), *Rethinking Nigeria’s Indigene-Settler Conflicts*, 2012.

¹⁰⁶ DW, “Nigeria: Farmer-herder Conflict Exposes Government Inaction,” December 29, 2023; GITOC, *Driving Destruction*; *The Guardian* (Lagos), “Killings: Fulani Avenging Injustice in Plateau, Says Herders Group,” July 25, 2025.

¹⁰⁷ LSE in Africa Blog, “The Violence in Nigeria’s Middle Belt Has Long Historical Roots,” August 2025; ACSS, “The Growing Complexity of Farmer-Herder Conflict in West and Central Africa,” July 12, 2021.

¹⁰⁸ Dangerous Speech Project, “How Dangerous Speech Exacerbates Farmer-Herder Conflicts in Nigeria,” July 29, 2020; Hudson Institute, “The North-South Divide: Nigerian Discourses on Boko Haram, the Fulani, and Islamization,” October 25, 2021; and *Pastoralism*, “The Danger of a Single Story About Fulani Pastoralists,” 2022.

¹⁰⁹ See for example Hudson Institute, “The North-South Divide,” James Courtright, Fulani Responses to Pastoralist Crisis and Mass Violence, February 2025.

¹¹⁰ For more on banditry, see DIIS, *Divided They Rule? The Emerging Banditry Landscape in Northwest Nigeria*, 2025; IPI Global Observatory, “Northwest Nigeria Has a Banditry Problem. What’s Driving It?” May 22, 2024; GITOC and ACLED, *Armed Bandits in Nigeria*, July 2024.

¹¹¹ DIIS, “Battle for the Bush,” GI-TOC and ACLED, *Armed Bandits in Nigeria*.

are reportedly Fulani, but Fulani are also victims of bandit activity.¹¹² Bandits' motivations vary: studies suggest some are driven by financial motivations or notoriety, while others say they joined bandit gangs in response to the marginalization of the Fulani or other pastoralist grievances.¹¹³

Bandit gangs have become increasingly lethal, with over 9,200 deaths attributed to them from 2019 through 2024, including an estimated 3,980 fatalities in 2024 alone.¹¹⁴ Such gangs have led kidnapping operations and killed hundreds in massacres, and some have even shot down military aircraft, leading the Nigerian government to designate bandits as terrorists in 2022. Despite military operations, by some estimates 30,000 bandits operate in northwest Nigeria, in groups ranging from as few as 10 to over 1,000 fighters.¹¹⁵ Traditional leaders and local authorities have sometimes been targeted in attacks by bandit gangs, who exert territorial control in some areas, extorting communities and sometimes providing basic services, such as settling local disputes.¹¹⁶ Researchers suggest bandits and extremists have collaborated in some cases, but have also clashed over control of territory.¹¹⁷ Most bandit gangs do not appear to espouse a political ideology, though some have reportedly mobilized under claims of protecting Fulani.¹¹⁸

Separatist and Criminal Violence in the Southeast

The Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a separatist group that claims to seek self-determination for Biafra, a self-declared republic in the southeast that tried to split from Nigeria in 1967, spurring a civil war. IPOB, formed in 2012, 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—and newer grievances, such as disputes between Muslim herders and Christian farmers. (The Igbo are predominantly Christian, and Igbo activists have long protested their perceived persecution by the Hausa-Fulani and other groups.) Tensions between IPOB and the government escalated after the 2015 arrest of IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu, and in 2020 the group formed an armed wing, the Eastern Security Network (ESN), purportedly in response to killings by herders. The security situation has since deteriorated. Gunmen have attacked police stations and killed state security personnel in multiple incidents, and human rights groups have accused security forces of arbitrary detention, enforced disappearances, torture, and killings in retaliation.¹¹⁹



¹¹² See for example DIIS, “Battle for the Bush”; UNIDIR, *Exposure, Not Identity? Understanding Victimization by Bandits in Nigeria’s North West*, November 2025.

¹¹³ GI-TOC and ACLED, *Armed Bandits in Nigeria*, 2024; *New Lines Magazine*, “The Bandit Warlords of Nigeria,” 2021; *The Cable* (Lagos), “In the North-West, One Man’s Bandit Is Another Man’s Freedom Fighter,” March 10, 2022.

¹¹⁴ ACSS, “Violent Criminal Gangs Displace and Disrupt North West Nigeria,” October 2024.

¹¹⁵ IPI Global Observatory, “Northwest Nigeria Has a Banditry Problem.”

¹¹⁶ GI-TOC and ACLED, *Armed Bandits in Nigeria*.

¹¹⁷ *CTC Sentinel*, “Northwestern Nigeria: A Jihadization of Banditry, or a ‘Banditization’ of Jihad?” January 2022; *Daily Trust*, “Dilemma of Kaduna Community Caught Between Ansaru, Bandit Hostilities,” August 6, 2022.

¹¹⁸ *CTC Sentinel*, “Northwestern Nigeria;” *New Lines*, “The Bandit Warlords of Nigeria.”

¹¹⁹ Amnesty, *A Decade of Impunity: Attacks and Unlawful Killings in South-East Nigeria*, August 13, 2025.

Violence surged around the 2023 elections. In mid-2023, gunmen attacked a U.S. government convoy in Anambra State, killing two U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) local staff and two police.¹²⁰ Responsibility for the attack remains debated. Nigerian authorities routinely attribute attacks in the southeast to IPOB, which often disavows responsibility. Splits in the group and a wider climate of criminality and militia activity in the region make it difficult to assess culpability, as various groups reportedly operate under the guise of ESN as cover for their own activities.¹²¹ Deadly clashes among cult gangs, farmer-herder violence, political violence, and a drug epidemic in the region all contribute to the complexity. The military has conducted multiple airstrikes against IPOB/ESN, sometimes killing civilians. Amnesty International reports that at least 1,844 people were killed in the southeast from 2021 through mid-2023.¹²²

In late 2025, Nnamdi Kanu was convicted on charges of terrorism and sentenced to life in prison. Some observers have cautioned that his sentence could escalate agitation for the Biafra cause.¹²³

Insecurity in the Niger Delta and Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

The oil-rich Niger Delta region, which borders the Gulf of Guinea, has struggled for decades with political unrest, criminality, and militancy linked to local grievances over perceived neglect, exploitation, and oil-related environmental devastation.¹²⁴ Militant violence in the Delta peaked in the late 2000s, when attacks on oil facilities and personnel led oil production to plummet. In 2009, the government announced an amnesty and introduced a monthly stipend for former



Niger Delta militants. The program stemmed attacks on oil facilities, but some analysts contend it failed to address root causes of insecurity, including the perceived exploitation of local resources without adequate compensation and development.¹²⁵ New militant groups emerged in 2015 and resumed attacks on oil infrastructure, albeit at a lower level than previously. A spate of pipeline ruptures in 2025 in Rivers State, by some accounts linked to a political power struggle, prompted President Tinubu to declare a six-month state of emergency in the oil-rich state.¹²⁶

Oil theft, known as “bunkering,” from oil pipelines for artisanal refinement and black-market sale has been a serious problem for Nigeria, which by some estimates was losing 10%-20% of its production to theft as recently as 2023.¹²⁷ Criminal networks, security personnel, oil workers, and politicians have been implicated, as have cult gangs/confraternities, which are found across Nigeria but are particularly prominent in the Delta.¹²⁸ Efforts under the Tinubu Administration to

¹²⁰ State Department, “Attack on U.S. Convoy in Nigeria,” May 17, 2023.

¹²¹ Hudson Institute, “Understanding the ‘Unknown Gunmen’ Who Attacked a US Convoy in Nigeria,” May 18, 2023.

¹²² Amnesty, *A Decade of Impunity: Attacks and Unlawful Killings in South-East Nigeria*.

¹²³ The Conversation, “Nigeria Has Jailed Biafra Separatist Leader Nnamdi Kanu,” December 7, 2025.

¹²⁴ ICG, *The Swamps of Insurgency: Nigeria’s Delta Unrest*, 2006, and *Fueling the Niger Delta Crisis*, 2006.

¹²⁵ See for example ICG, *Curbing Violence in Nigeria (III): Revisiting the Niger Delta*, September 2015.

¹²⁶ *Semafor*, “Pipeline Damage in Crisis State Highlights Nigeria’s Oil Sector Challenge,” March 20, 2025.

¹²⁷ *New Lines Magazine*, “The Oil Thieves of Nigeria,” January 26, 2023; *The Cable* (Lagos), “Nigeria Continues to Lose 400,000 Barrels of Oil Daily to Criminals, Says Ribadu,” August 27, 2023.

¹²⁸ Al Jazeera, “In Nigeria’s Crude Capital, a Plan to Win the War Against Oil Theft,” December 19, 2024; *New Lines*, (continued...)

counter theft, including through increased surveillance, appear to be having an impact, with losses from theft and sabotage dropping in 2025 to the lowest level in nearly 16 years.¹²⁹

Off Nigeria's coast, the Gulf of Guinea has been plagued by pirate activity. (Incidents in Nigerian territorial waters are classified as armed robbery at sea rather than piracy, which occurs in international waters.) This activity surged in the mid-to-late 2010s and peaked in 2020. It was initially heavily concentrated off Nigeria's coast, but as its security forces increased patrols, attacks in Nigerian waters declined, shifting to neighboring countries.¹³⁰ Per a 2021 study, Gulf of Guinea pirate gangs generated up to \$5 million a year through theft and hostage-taking, and the direct and indirect costs to the region may have neared \$2 billion annually.¹³¹ Countries in the region and international partners have taken steps to curb the threat, including via multinational exercises and patrols and improved communication between relevant authorities and the shipping industry, but shortcomings remain, including with respect to jurisdictional responsibility.¹³²

Trafficking in Persons and Narcotics Trafficking

Trafficking in Persons. Nigeria is a source, transit point, and destination for human trafficking. In its 2025 *Trafficking in Persons Report*, the State Department ranked Nigeria as Tier 2, meaning it does not fully meet standards for eliminating trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so.¹³³ The report found that efforts to identify and protect trafficking victims among vulnerable populations were inadequate, and that corruption in trafficking crimes remained a concern.

Narcotics Trafficking. Drug trafficking is another key challenge and has been a long-standing focus of U.S. law enforcement assistance. Nigeria is a source, transit point, and market for illicit recreational drugs (e.g., cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine) as well as real and counterfeit opioids and other pharmaceuticals (e.g., tramadol, codeine, and anti-malarial drugs).¹³⁴

Cybercrime and Financial Crime

Cybercrime in Nigeria has been another focus of U.S. law enforcement assistance and justice sector actions. Nigeria is a global hub for cybercriminal activity, including “Nigerian prince” or “419 scams”—advance-fee fraud nicknamed for the article in Nigeria's penal code that outlaws fraud—as well as business email compromise attacks and identity theft. Nigerians are prominent in “romance scams,” in which conspirators defraud victims via fake online romantic relationships. Nigerian fraudsters reportedly stole millions of dollars in U.S. COVID-19 relief payments.¹³⁵ Scam centers have proliferated in Nigeria since 2020, often operated by confraternities.¹³⁶ Nigeria has become Africa's largest cryptocurrency market, and the sector poses substantial risks in terms of fraud, money laundering, and terrorist financing. Experts have warned that terrorist groups in

“The Oil Thieves of Nigeria”; and TI, *Military Involvement in Oil Theft in the Niger Delta*, 2019. On cult gangs, see *The Africa Report*, “Nigerian Cult Mafia Groups and How They Wreak Havoc on Society,” February 28, 2025.

¹²⁹ S&P Global, “Nigeria Oil Theft at 16-Year Low,” *Punch* (Lagos), “End Oil Theft Permanently!” April 15, 2026.

¹³⁰ Atlantic Council, “Atlantic Piracy, Current Threats, and Maritime Governance in the Gulf of Guinea,” July 2025.

¹³¹ Stable Seas, *Pirates of the Gulf of Guinea: A Cost Analysis for Coastal States*, December 7, 2021.

¹³² Center for Maritime Strategy, “Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea: Progress and Future Challenges,” August 7, 2025.

¹³³ State Department, *2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Nigeria*, 2025.

¹³⁴ UNODC, *Tramadol and Other Pharmaceutical Opioids Trafficking in West Africa*, 2021.

¹³⁵ NBC, “Easy Money: How International Scam Artists Pulled Off an Epic Theft of Covid Benefits,” August 15, 2021.

¹³⁶ GI-TOC, *A World of Deceit: Mapping the Landscape of the Global Scam Centre Phenomenon*, March 2026. See also ACSS, “Black Axe—Nigeria's Most Notorious Transnational Criminal Organization,” October 29, 2024.

Nigeria may hide their transactions in cryptocurrency transfers.¹³⁷ 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 and convictions, including in U.S. courts.

Religious Persecution and Conflict

Nigeria presents a complex picture regarding religious freedom and interfaith relations. The country has a history of religious tolerance and nonviolent conflict resolution between faith groups, but it has also experienced substantial interreligious violence. Religious discrimination is a serious issue in some of Nigeria's states, despite a federal constitution that enshrines freedom of religion. Some observers contend that the federal government, under successive presidents, has taken limited action to address concerns about religious freedom and violence.¹³⁸

Nigeria's legal system combines English common law, customary law, and, in northern states, sharia (Islamic law). The constitution prohibits the adoption of a state religion and enshrines "freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including the freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest or propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance." The constitution allows for sharia courts to adjudicate civil proceedings involving Islamic law.

Selected Concerns

Sharia Law and Blasphemy. Muslims in northern Nigeria have observed sharia for centuries, though the jurisdiction of sharia courts was limited to personal matters after independence. After Nigeria's transition to civilian rule in 1999, several state governments in the north reintroduced sharia-based criminal codes, which now operate in 12 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory surrounding Abuja. Per the constitution, sharia courts may not compel participation by non-Muslims, but some non-Muslims and Shia Muslims (a minority in the predominantly Sunni north) have reportedly experienced discrimination under sharia.¹³⁹ Some sharia courts have ordered death sentences, but only one execution has been carried out, for murder, in 2002.

Religious freedom groups have expressed particular concern with prosecutions for blasphemy, which is forbidden under sharia, customary law, and the criminal codes of some states.¹⁴⁰ Secular courts have overturned some blasphemy convictions; others have been upheld. Mubarak Bala, a self-described atheist labeled by the congressionally-mandated U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF) and the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission as a Prisoner of Conscience, was sentenced in 2022 by a Kano state court to 24 years in prison on blasphemy charges related to his social media posts. After interventions by Members of Congress and U.S. officials, his sentence was reduced and he was released in 2025.¹⁴¹ Another USCIRF Religious Prisoner of Conscience, musician Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, was convicted for blasphemy in 2020 and sentenced to death. His conviction was overturned, but he remains in prison pending retrial. He has appealed to Nigeria's Supreme Court to free him and declare Kano's blasphemy law unconstitutional. The ECOWAS Court of Justice issued a landmark ruling in 2025 that provisions

¹³⁷ GNET, "Combating Islamic State Finance: West Africa and the Sahel."

¹³⁸ See for example reports of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF).

¹³⁹ See for example 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.

¹⁴⁰ The Conversation, "Blasphemy in Nigeria's Legal Systems: An Explainer," May 15, 2022.

¹⁴¹ Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, "Mubarak Bala," Defending Freedoms Project.

of Kano's blasphemy laws are incompatible with international human rights standards, particularly the right to freedom of expression. Kano authorities have rejected the ruling.¹⁴²

Beyond the courts, blasphemy allegations have sometimes spurred mob violence, including at least three lynchings since 2022. Human rights groups report that attackers, sometimes incited by Islamic clerics, seldom face arrest or prosecution.¹⁴³ Among the victims was Deborah Yacubu, a Christian woman who was killed in Sokoto in 2022. Another Christian woman, Rhoda Jatau, was subsequently jailed in Bauchi State for over a year after she shared a video on social media condemning Yacubu's killing, which spurred a violent mob. Jatau, who was charged with inciting public disturbance, contempt of religious creed, and cyber-stalking, was acquitted in 2024.

Anti-Shia Repression. Nigeria's minority Shia Muslim community is concentrated in the northwest. Many belong to the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), a religious movement led by cleric Ibrahim Zakzaky, a longtime government critic. Human rights groups have repeatedly accused security forces of using excessive force to disperse IMN gatherings, including in a 2014 incident in which three of Zakzaky's sons were killed.¹⁴⁴ In 2015, after a confrontation over a roadblock, the military reportedly killed nearly 350 IMN members and arrested Zakzaky and hundreds of others.¹⁴⁵ Zakzaky was charged with murder over the death of a soldier. Security forces killed dozens and arrested hundreds during ensuing IMN protests calling for his release, and in 2019 the government banned IMN for "acts of terrorism and illegality."¹⁴⁶ Zakzaky, whom USCIRF named a Religious Prisoner of Conscience, was acquitted and released in 2021. Several smaller incidents have since transpired.¹⁴⁷

Islamist Extremism. Boko Haram, which launched an Islamist insurgency in 2009, drew global attention with a series of church bombings on Christmas Day in 2011 and with its abduction of 276 schoolgirls, most of them Christian, from Chibok in 2014. At least 91 of the Chibok girls are still missing; many who escaped or were released described forced religious conversion and marriage.¹⁴⁸ Boko Haram's church bombings in 2011 were a shift for the group, which had previously targeted primarily security forces and state authorities, occurring in several cities across the country, beyond its base of operations in the northeast.¹⁴⁹ Some experts assess the church bombings were intended to spur religious strife.¹⁵⁰ Boko Haram's leaders framed their insurgency as a jihad against Nigeria, Christianity, and the West, and categorized all non-adherents to their movement, Christian or Muslim, as infidels who can be killed or enslaved.¹⁵¹

¹⁴² *Vanguard*, "ECOWAS Court Judgement on Blasphemy and Challenges of Enforcement," April 24, 2025.

¹⁴³ Amnesty, *Nigeria: Escalation of Mob Violence Emboldens Impunity*, October 28, 2024.

¹⁴⁴ State Department, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014*, 2015.

¹⁴⁵ HRW, "Nigeria: End Impunity for Killings of Shia," December 12, 2018.

¹⁴⁶ *NYT*, "Nigeria Says Soldiers Who Killed Marchers Were Provoked. Video Shows Otherwise," December 17, 2018; State Department, *2019 Report on International Religious Freedom*, 2020.

¹⁴⁷ State Department, *2023 Report on International Religious Freedom*.

¹⁴⁸ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Nigeria: UN Committee Finds Grave and Systematic Violations Persist After Chibok Mass Abduction of Schoolgirls," September 2025.

¹⁴⁹ *CTC Sentinel*, "Boko Haram Escalates Attacks on Christians in Northern Nigeria," April 2012.

¹⁵⁰ Combatting Terrorism Center at West Point (CTC), "Local, Global, or in Between? Boko Haram's Messaging, Strategy, Membership, and Support Networks," 2018; "Nigerian Group Escalates Violence with Church Attacks," *New York Times*, December 25, 2011.

¹⁵¹ CTC, *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines: Analyses of Africa's Enduring Insurgency*, 2018; Brookings, "The Disease Is Unbelief: Boko Haram's Religious and Political Worldview," 2016; and Hudson Institute, "Boko Haram 2.0?"

Boko Haram's attacks on Muslim civilians contributed to its fragmentation.¹⁵² The first split came in 2011-2012 with Ansaru, which condemned the killing of Muslim civilians. A larger faction split in 2016, also criticizing Boko Haram's treatment of Muslims, and gained recognition from the Islamic State's global leadership. Rebranded as IS-WA, the larger offshoot, which actively targets majority Christian villages, has sought to make inroads with local Muslim communities and primarily focused its attacks on government targets, but the group still justifies targeting Muslims for alleged apostasy or supporting government counterinsurgency efforts.¹⁵³ IS-WA and JAS have sought to enforce a strict interpretation of sharia on Muslims in areas they control.

Mass abductions and kidnappings for ransom have become increasingly common since the Chibok attack—some incidents are attributed to jihadists, others to bandits and other criminal gangs.¹⁵⁴ Reports suggest over 2,000 children, both Christian and Muslim, have been abducted from Nigerian schools since 2014.¹⁵⁵ IS-WA justified its 2018 abduction of 110 girls, all but one of them Muslim, from the town of Dapchi (Yobe State) by calling them apostates for receiving Western education.¹⁵⁶ IS-WA later released the Muslim girls after claiming they repented; it continues to hold the one Christian, Leah Sharibu, who reportedly would not renounce her faith.¹⁵⁷ Among more recent incidents were two school kidnappings in November 2025: in the first, 25 Muslim girls were kidnapped from a school in Kebbi State, and days later, over 300 students were taken from a Catholic school in neighboring Niger State.¹⁵⁸ Authorities have not indicated who was responsible, but some reports suggest the government paid JAS militants ransom for the Niger State students.¹⁵⁹ Financial incentive increasingly appears to be the leading motivation for kidnappings, whether conducted by extremists or criminal groups.¹⁶⁰

Churches in Nigeria are a newer target for mass kidnappings. In late 2025, 38 people were abducted from a church in Kwara State, reportedly by a bandit gang who demanded ransom for their release.¹⁶¹ In January 2026, over 170 people were kidnapped from three churches in Kaduna State; they have since been released, but it remains unclear who was responsible.

Middle Belt Violence. Nigeria's diverse Middle Belt has long been a theater for ethno-religious conflict. For decades, concerns centered on recurrent riots between Muslims and Christians, often sparked by an event of religious significance such as alleged blasphemy. Intercommunal violence also is sometimes related to farmer-herder disputes, as noted above. Many analysts contend that religious ideology is not the primary driver of such conflicts, which may stem from land,

¹⁵² CTC Sentinel, "Leadership analysis of Boko Haram and Ansaru in Nigeria," February 2014; CTC, *Boko Haram Beyond the Headlines*; and ICG, *JAS vs. ISWAP*.

¹⁵³ International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), *Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Surge in Female Abductions in Southeastern Niger*, 2021; ISS, "The End of ISWAP's 'Hearts and Minds' Strategy?" September 6, 2024.

¹⁵⁴ GITOC, "What Does the Recent Escalation of Mass Abductions in Nigeria Tell Us?" March 15, 2024; SB Morgen, *Locust Business: The Economics of Nigeria's Kidnap Industry*, August 2025.

¹⁵⁵ OHCHR, "Nigeria: UN Committee Finds Grave and Systematic Violations Persist After Chibok;" UNICEF, "On the 10-Year Mark of the Chibok Abductions, UNICEF Urges Action to Secure Children's Education in Nigeria," April 15, 2024; and ISS, "Nigeria's Schoolchildren Again Targeted in Mass Abductions," February 13, 2025.

¹⁵⁶ CTC Sentinel, "The Terrorist Calculus in Kidnapping Girls in Nigeria: Cases from Chibok and Dapchi," March 7, 2018; ICCT, *Boko Haram, the Islamic State, and the Surge in Female Abductions in Southeastern Niger*.

¹⁵⁷ Five girls died in captivity. BBC, "Dapchi Girls: Freed Nigerian Girls Tell of Kidnap Ordeal," March 22, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ For more on the attacks, see "25 girls Abducted from School in Nigeria," *New York Times*, November 18, 2025 and "A Roar of Motorcycles and the Terrifying Night of a Mass Kidnapping," December 17, 2025.

¹⁵⁹ AP, "Nigerians Welcome Release of 130 Schoolchildren and Teachers Kidnapped from Catholic School," December 23, 2025; AFP, "Nigeria Paid Ransom for Kidnapped Pupils: Intel Sources," February 23, 2026.

¹⁶⁰ ISS, "Nigeria's Schoolchildren Again Targeted in Mass Abductions," February 13, 2025.

¹⁶¹ Reuters, "Nigerian Police Arrest 33-Member Gang over Kwara Church Abductions," April 14, 2026.

resource, and political disputes between “indigene” communities and “settler” Fulani.¹⁶² Some Christian communities in the Middle Belt, however, view this violence through the lens of historic narratives around a Fulani-led jihad in 1804 that resulted in the Sokoto Caliphate, a powerful Islamic empire in the 19th century, and some believe attacks by suspected Fulani militia are part of a coordinated agenda to drive them from their land and “Islamize” the region.¹⁶³

Whether driven primarily by religion or other factors, violence in the Middle Belt has aggravated religious tensions and spurred killings along religious lines and attacks on churches and mosques. Nigerian Christians say they have borne the brunt of the violence, while Fulani say they also face targeted attacks.¹⁶⁴ Some advocates say Nigerian Christians are being persecuted for their faith, and some assert they are facing a genocide.¹⁶⁵ One Nigerian bishop testified to Congress in 2025 that “the experience of the Nigerian Christians today can be summed up as that of a Church under Islamist extermination.”¹⁶⁶ Some activists contend Fulani militias are waging a jihad against Christians and Nigeria’s government is complicit in a plot to forcibly Islamize the country.¹⁶⁷ Another advocate posited that “violence in Nigeria enjoys wide-ranging expressions, but for Christians it is never without a religious root.... For Christians, conflict between herders and farmers might be more than a religious clash with Muslims, but it is never less.”¹⁶⁸

Data on Religious Violence

Reports on religious violence in Nigeria cite a wide variety of fatality estimates, reflecting different methodologies, sourcing, definitions, and interpretations. Some estimates focus on deaths attributed to Boko Haram and its offshoots. Others also include deaths from farmer-herder and other intercommunal violence; some include killings by bandits and other criminal groups. Some fatality estimates include both civilian and security force deaths; some include militant deaths. Available fatality databases for Nigeria do not routinely provide a breakdown by religious affiliation, and press reports from which databases may draw often do not mention the religious identity of victims. Analysts may face challenges in determining whether and the extent to which violence is motivated by religion versus the other factors.

According to ACLED (the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data project), an independent global conflict monitor that maintains an accessible database, roughly 53,000 Nigerians, both Christians and Muslims, have been killed in political violence since 2009 (when Boko Haram attacks began), including 21,000 deaths in 2020-2025.¹⁶⁹ ACLED identified 384 “targeted events against Christians,” resulting in 317 deaths, from 2020 through September

¹⁶² A study by Search for Common Ground, a U.S. group 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.” SFCG, *Pastoralism and Conflict in the Sudano-Sahel*. For an analysis emphasizing 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.

¹⁶³ LSE Blog, “The Violence in Nigeria’s Middle Belt Has Long Historical Roots,” ICG, *Herders against Farmers*; Good Governance Africa, “Fulani and Jihad in West Africa: A Complex Relationship,” October 13, 2020; NPR, “‘We Are Being Driven from the Land.’ Nigerian Village Buries Its Dead After a Massacre,” July 26, 2025.

¹⁶⁴ The Conversation, “Is There a Christian Genocide in Nigeria? Evidence Shows All Faiths Are Under Attack by Terrorists,” November 5, 2025; HumAngle, “Terror from the Trolls,” August 30, 2024; Reuters, “Death Toll in Nigeria Mosque Attack Rises to 50, Dozens Abducted,” August 20, 2025; and BBC, “‘Peace Is a Gradual Thing’: How Land, Cattle and Identity Fuel a Deadly Nigerian Conflict,” March 21, 2026.

¹⁶⁵ Nina Shea, “Nigeria’s Religious-Cleansing Crisis Is Not Due to Climate Change,” *National Review*, June 21, 2022; Eze Ebube, “Nigerian Christians Are Being Slaughtered. Call It Genocide,” *USA Today*, February 28, 2026.

¹⁶⁶ Testimony by Rev. Wilfred C. Anagbe in House Foreign Affairs Committee (HFAC) Subcommittee on Africa, “Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The Case for a CPC Designation,” March 12, 2025.

¹⁶⁷ Testimonies of Nina Shea in HFAC Subcommittee on Africa hearings on Nigeria in March and November 2025.

¹⁶⁸ International Christian Concern, “Essential Perceptions in Nigeria’s Herder Farmer Dispute,” August 11, 2023.

¹⁶⁹ ACLED data cited in BBC, “Are Christians Being Persecuted in Nigeria as Trump Claims?” November 6, 2025.

2025.¹⁷⁰ ACLED notes in its methodology that it does not routinely disaggregate victims of political violence by religious affiliation, but does capture cases in which the religious identity of the victim is salient in their targeting.¹⁷¹ ACLED data may be constrained by what information is available in public reporting.

ACLED's estimate of Christians killed for their faith in Nigeria is far smaller than some estimates cited by Christian advocacy groups, some of which contend that as many as 125,000 Nigerian Christians have been killed for their faith since 2009.¹⁷² This estimate has been challenged in several analyses.¹⁷³ President Trump has cited a figure of 3,100 Christians killed in Nigeria between October 2023 and September 2024, which per the White House came from Open Doors, an international charity that researches Christian persecution.¹⁷⁴ This figure included deaths attributed to Boko Haram and its offshoots as well as to what Open Doors terms "Fulani Terror Groups," a framing rejected by some Nigeria analysts who say it lumps together a range of actors with disparate aims.¹⁷⁵

According to the non-governmental *Global Terrorism Index* there have been 12,581 deaths from Islamist terrorism in Nigeria since 2007, with 565 deaths in 2024 and 750 in 2025. Of the 2025 deaths, 67% were civilians and 19% were military, with the rest police or other.¹⁷⁶ The Africa Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS, a U.S. government entity), using ACLED data, attributed a larger death toll to militant Islamist activity in 2025—almost 4,018 in the northeast and 126 in the northwest—but these figures include civilians, soldiers, police, and Islamist militants themselves.¹⁷⁷ Publicly available databases do not provide a breakdown of the death toll from jihadist violence by religious affiliation, but such violence has primarily occurred in the predominately Muslim northeast, where, by many accounts, a majority of the civilians killed have been Muslim.¹⁷⁸

The Humanitarian Situation

Years of conflict and related displacement have fueled a complex humanitarian emergency in Nigeria, with an estimated 36 million people facing severe hunger in 2026—the highest level of hunger projected for the country since monitoring began—and over four million displaced.¹⁷⁹ Roughly two million children in northern Nigeria suffer from severe acute malnutrition (SAM); a

¹⁷⁰ BBC, "Are Christians Being Persecuted in Nigeria as Trump Claims?" See also ACLED, "Attacks on Christians Spike in Nigeria Alongside Overall Rise in Violence Targeting Civilians," July 21, 2022.

¹⁷¹ ACLED's explanation of its methodology and sourcing is available at <https://acleddata.com/methodology/sourcing>.

¹⁷² Some advocacy reports use figures from a Nigerian source, the International Society for Civil Liberties and Rule of Law (InterSociety), which reported in 2025 that 125,009 Christians had been killed since 2009. In 2023, InterSociety reported that 52,250 Christians had been "butchered or hacked to death" in Nigeria since 2009. InterSociety, "Martyred Christians in Nigeria," April 2023 and "Nigeria Headquartering 22 Islamic Terror Groups in Africa Seeking to Obliterate Christianity and Indigenous Cultural Heritage and Impose Sultanate in Nigeria by 2075," August 2025.

¹⁷³ See for example *NYT*, "The Screwdriver Salesman Behind Trump's Airstrikes in Nigeria," January 2026; BBC, "Are Christians Being Persecuted in Nigeria as Trump Claims?" November 6, 2025; and ICG, "Why Is President Trump Threatening a Humanitarian Intervention in Nigeria?" November 7, 2025.

¹⁷⁴ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social post, October 31, 2025; BBC, "Are Christians Being Persecuted in Nigeria as Trump Claims?"

¹⁷⁵ See for example Hudson Institute, "A Better Understanding of Nigeria's Problems," November 5, 2025 and "The North-South Divide."

¹⁷⁶ Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2026*. GTI uses Dragonfly's Terrorism Tracker database.

¹⁷⁷ ACSS, "The Widening Scope of Africa's Militant Islamist Threat," April 6, 2026.

¹⁷⁸ See for example *UN News*, "Violence Roiling Nigeria Extends Beyond Religious Lines, amid a Deepening Humanitarian Crisis," January 29, 2026; BBC, "Are Christians Being Persecuted in Nigeria as Trump Claims?"; Reuters, "Nigeria Says US Help Against Islamist Insurgents Must Respect Its Sovereignty," November 3, 2025; CFR, "Conflict in Nigeria Is More Complicated Than 'Christians vs. Muslims,'" May 1, 2019; and Brookings, "*The Disease Is Unbelief*."

¹⁷⁹ Roughly 3.7 million Nigerians were internally displaced as of June 2026, including over 2.3 million in the northeast, 793,534 in the northwest, and 584,590 in north-central Nigeria. Over 417,000 Nigerian refugees are in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Reuters, "Nigeria Faces Record Hunger amid Insurgent Attacks, Aid Cuts," November 25, 2025; World Food Program (WFP), "Conflict and Shrinking Humanitarian Assistance Drives Northern Nigeria Hunger Crisis to Levels Not Seen in Nearly a Decade," July 2, 2026; and UNHCR, "Forcibly Displaced Population in Nigeria," June 1, 2026.

fraction—20%—are being treated, per aid agencies.¹⁸⁰ Donor funding cuts by the United States and others have led aid agencies to scale down food and nutrition assistance since 2025, including for civilians affected by the violence in the northeast.¹⁸¹ Among other impacts, the drop in donor funding led the UN to close half of its nutrition clinics in the northeast, where malnutrition rates are highest.¹⁸²

Over 900,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the northeast live in overcrowded camps, and most are heavily dependent on aid for basic food needs.¹⁸³ The targeting of civilians by Boko Haram and its offshoots has destroyed livelihoods, spurred displacement, and limited access to farmland and markets. In Borno, the epicenter of the Islamist insurgency, the state government has tried for years to close the camps and push IDPs to return to their home areas, but resurgent attacks and a lack of economic opportunities deter IDP returns.¹⁸⁴

The 2026 UN humanitarian appeal for Nigeria of \$516 million aims to target 2.5 million people in the three northeast states most affected by jihadist violence.¹⁸⁵ The 2025 appeal of \$910 million was 31% funded, well below prior year funding levels.¹⁸⁶ The smaller appeal for 2026—the lowest in a decade for Nigeria—reflects a UN decision to scale back planned responses globally in response to donor funding gaps, and to prioritize the most life-threatening needs.¹⁸⁷ The UN has named Nigeria as one of eight “transition countries” in its Humanitarian Reset (its proposed overhaul of the humanitarian aid system in response to the funding crisis): countries with protracted crises where international humanitarian operations are being phased out.¹⁸⁸ The UN says it envisions aid operations in Nigeria being locally led, implemented, and funded by 2028.

Foreign Affairs

West Africa. Nigeria, which hosts the headquarters of ECOWAS, is a heavyweight in the region. The country has repeatedly used its influence, and sometimes intervened militarily, to counter military takeovers and instability in West Africa. In the most recent example, Nigeria’s military intervened under ECOWAS auspices, and with reported French support, to thwart a coup attempt

¹⁸⁰ International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Society (IFRC), “Nigeria | Acute Malnutrition—Operational Update,” February 13, 2026; and UNICEF Nigeria, “Nutrition” at <https://www.unicef.org/nigeria/nutrition>.

¹⁸¹ See for example Reuters, “Hunger Grows in Nigeria as Aid Cuts Reduce Food Supplies,” September 4, 2025; UNICEF, “Nigeria Humanitarian Situation Report,” December 31, 2025.

¹⁸² UNICEF Nigeria, “Lives on Hold,” August 19, 2025; IFRC, “Nigeria | Acute Malnutrition.”

¹⁸³ International Organization for Migration (IOM), *Nigeria—North-East Displacement Report 51*, February 2025; FEWS NET, “Nigeria Food Security Outlook, February-September 2026,” February 18, 2026.

¹⁸⁴ *TNH*, “Boko Haram Is Back, and Nigeria’s IDP Return Policy Is in Trouble,” November 5, 2025; *Al Jazeera*, “‘We Will Stay’: Displaced Nigerians Fear Boko Haram, Stay in Closing Camps,” September 19, 2025; HRW, “Resurgence of Suicide Bombings in Nigeria’s Boko Haram Conflict,” June 24, 2025 and “*Those Who Returned Are Suffering*”: Impact of Camp Shutdowns on People Displaced by Boko Haram Conflict in Nigeria, 2022. See also BBC, “Aid Cuts Will Push Nigerians into Arms of Boko Haram Militants, UN Warns,” July 30, 2025.

¹⁸⁵ OCHA, “Nigeria,” *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026*, December 8, 2026.

¹⁸⁶ UN humanitarian appeals for Nigeria were above \$1 billion for much of the past decade; reported funding for those appeals ranged from \$550 million to \$770 million. See OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service at fts.unocha.org.

¹⁸⁷ OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2026*, December 8, 2025. See also AP, “UN Warns of ‘Catastrophic Hunger Crisis in Nigeria as Food Aid Funding Runs Out,’” January 22, 2026; WFP, “WFP Warns of Imminent Food Assistance Cuts in Nigeria as Violence and Hunger Surges Across the North,” January 22, 2026.

¹⁸⁸ OCHA, “The Humanitarian Reset,” March 2025 and *Nigeria Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026*.

in neighboring Benin in late 2025.¹⁸⁹ Some observers suggest its influence has waned in recent years as its own domestic security challenges have grown.¹⁹⁰

President Tinubu faced a major foreign policy test early in his tenure with the 2023 coup in Niger—it was the sixth military seizure of power in Africa since 2020. When Tinubu was elected by regional leaders as ECOWAS chairman just before the coup, he stressed the importance of preserving civilian rule and democracy in the region, declaring, “We will not allow coup after coup in West Africa.”¹⁹¹ He initially took a tough stance on Niger, demanding the democratically-elected government’s return, threatening military force to reverse the coup, closing the border and cutting electricity supplies to the country, and imposing other sanctions that disrupted trade. Other ECOWAS heads of state joined him in border closures and economic sanctions described as “the strictest the bloc has ever imposed on an errant member state.”¹⁹² Tinubu’s threats provoked a backlash at home amid concerns that a regional military intervention would rely heavily on Nigeria’s army, and over sanctions, which Nigeria lifted in early 2024.¹⁹³ Ultimately, there was no intervention. Tinubu was re-elected for another one-year term as ECOWAS chair in 2024, despite a threat from Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso to leave the bloc, which they did in early 2025.

Niger’s coup and Nigeria’s response strained their bilateral security cooperation, including with respect to the Multi-National Joint Task Force (MNJTF), a regional security coalition formed in 2015 to counter Boko Haram. Nigeria and Niger signed a deal to enhance security cooperation in August 2024, but later that year Niger’s military leader accused Nigerian officials of plotting with France to destabilize Niger (a charge Nigeria denied).¹⁹⁴ Niger withdrew from the MNJTF in early 2025. Officials from the two countries have since sought to ease tensions.

China. China is Nigeria’s largest bilateral lender and its top source of imported goods, and Nigeria has been a leading regional recipient of PRC-origin FDI. PRC-based construction firms have undertaken various infrastructure and public works projects there, many financed by China’s Export-Import Bank.¹⁹⁵ Recent projects include new railways, highways, and airport terminals; Nigeria’s second-largest hydroelectric power plant; and the \$1.5 billion Lekki Deep Sea Port in Lagos, which is operated by a PRC-based firm that holds a controlling stake in the port. China built ECOWAS’s new headquarters in Abuja and plans to finance a \$60 million bullet train project. In 2025, a PRC state-owned contractor entered into a deal estimated at over \$20 billion to build the Ogidigben Gas Revolution Industrial Park, which aims to transform Nigeria’s natural gas reserves into higher-value products, stimulate industrial growth in the Niger Delta, and generate thousands of jobs.¹⁹⁶ China is a major investor in Nigeria’s information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure, with heavy involvement from Huawei and other PRC-based technology firms. China has also financed Nigeria’s satellite development and military space technologies.¹⁹⁷

¹⁸⁹ ICG, “A Foiled Coup in Benin, and a Win for ECOWAS and Nigeria,” December 12, 2025.

¹⁹⁰ DW, “Benin Coup Attempt Exposes Nigeria’s Waning Power,” December 18, 2025.

¹⁹¹ VOA, “West African Bloc Names Nigeria’s Bola Tinubu as New Head,” July 9, 2023.

¹⁹² ICG, “ECOWAS, Nigeria and the Niger Coup Sanctions: Time to Recalibrate,” December 5, 2023.

¹⁹³ BBC, “Nigeria’s President Tinubu Faces Backlash over Military Intervention in Niger,” August 7, 2023.

¹⁹⁴ BBC, “Nigeria Denies Colluding with France to Destabilise Niger,” December 27, 2024.

¹⁹⁵ On PRC finance and investment activities, see Boston University Global Development Policy Center’s Chinese Loans to Africa database and the American Enterprise Institute’s China Global Investment Tracker.

¹⁹⁶ *Business Insider Africa*, “Nigeria Emerges Top Belt and Road Beneficiary with China-Backed \$24.6bn GRIP Megaproject,” January 19, 2026.

¹⁹⁷ USIP, *China’s Space Collaboration with Africa: Implications and Recommendations for the United States*, 2023.

Nigeria and China upgraded their relationship to a “comprehensive strategic partnership” in 2024, and in 2025 signaled plans to enhance cooperation on energy, defense, cybercrime, and finance.¹⁹⁸ As part of those plans, China pledged to support Nigeria’s issuance of Panda bonds (renminbi-denominated bonds from non-PRC issuers) to fund infrastructure development. China is expanding its media and information operations in Nigeria and in Africa more broadly.¹⁹⁹

China has been a leading supplier of military equipment to Nigeria in recent decades, as in much of Africa. Recent Nigerian acquisitions include tanks, armored vehicles, aircraft, drones, and artillery systems.²⁰⁰ Nigeria announced a deal in 2025 with PRC state-owned Norinco under which Nigeria would begin local production of military-grade ammunition and servicing of defense equipment, and Norinco would reportedly transfer “advanced defense technology.”²⁰¹

Russia. Russia has been a prominent supplier of military equipment, including attack helicopters, to Nigeria, which also continues to operate some Soviet-era equipment. The two countries signed a military cooperation agreement in 2021. Russia’s 2022 invasion of Ukraine spurred friction: it roiled global food, fuel, and fertilizer markets, harming Nigeria’s economy, and then-President Buhari alleged that weapons from the war were diverted to non-state actors in Nigeria and neighboring countries.²⁰² Nigeria voted with the United States on four of six UN General Assembly resolutions on the war in 2022-2023, abstaining on the other two. President Tinubu did not attend Russia’s 2023 Africa Summit; Vice President Shettima did. Some observers have raised concern with a reported surge in Russian influence operations targeting Nigerian audiences.²⁰³

BRICS. Nigeria joined the BRICS bloc (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in 2025 as a “partner country,” a new category that also includes, from Africa, Uganda. Three African countries are full members: South Africa joined in 2010, and Ethiopia and Egypt joined in 2024.

U.S. Relations and Assistance

Successive U.S. Administrations have described the U.S.-Nigeria relationship as among the most important in Africa.²⁰⁴ The country’s size and economic weight make it an influential African actor, and U.S. officials routinely cite shared democratic values when talking about bilateral ties.²⁰⁵ Secretaries of State under each Administration from President Clinton through President Biden visited Nigeria. Opinion polls in mid-2025 suggested that Nigerians had among the highest favorable views of the United States and President Trump globally, among countries surveyed.²⁰⁶

¹⁹⁸ *South China Morning Post*, “Nigeria Courts Chinese Investment as Interest Booms in Oil, Gas and Bigger Opportunities,” March 24, 2025; Reuters, “Nigeria, China Deepen Ties with Pledge on Security, Finance and Economic Growth,” January 9, 2025.

¹⁹⁹ See for example China Global South Project, “CGTN to Expand African Operations,” March 25, 2025.

²⁰⁰ *Military Africa*, “Nigeria and China Enhances Military Partnership,” January 12, 2025; *Eurasian Times*, “After Selling Fighter Jets, Tanks, Howitzers to Nigeria, China Cements Military Ties with Joint Naval Drills,” June 5, 2024.

²⁰¹ *Business Insider Africa*, “China Expands Military Supply Pact in Africa with New Nigeria Deal,” May 7, 2025.

²⁰² VOA, “Nigerian President: Ukraine War Funneling Arms, Fighters into Lake Chad Basin,” November 30, 2022.

²⁰³ See for example Center for a New American Security, “Russia Is Winning the Battle for Influence in Nigeria,” December 15, 2025; ACSS, “Mapping a Surge of Disinformation in Africa,” March 13, 2024.

²⁰⁴ State Department, “U.S. Security Cooperation with Nigeria,” January 20, 2025; “The Enduring Partnership Between the United States and Nigeria,” November 9, 2018; “Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects for Advancing Durable Peace,” September 28, 2017; and “Examining the U.S.-Nigeria Relationship in a Time of Transition,” February 23, 2010.

²⁰⁵ See from the State Department: “The Federal Republic of Nigeria’s Independence Day,” September 30, 2020; Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Nigerian Foreign Minister Yusuf Maitama Tuggar at Joint Press Availability, January 23, 2024; “Nigeria National Day,” October 1, 2024; and “Nigeria National Day,” October 1, 2025.

²⁰⁶ Pew Research Center, “U.S. Image Declines in Many Nations amid Low Confidence in Trump,” June 11, 2025.

The United States and Nigeria have several platforms for bilateral engagement. The U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission (BNC) is a strategic dialogue that features high-level visits and talks on shared interests. The most recent BNC, in 2024, included talks on trade, security cooperation, and the digital economy, among other issues. The U.S.-Nigeria Commercial and Investment Partnership (CIP), a five-year framework launched in 2024, held its latest ministerial in January 2026. 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 Nigerian diaspora in the United States. The State Department currently maintains a Level 3 Travel Advisory for Nigeria, which reads in part, “Reconsider travel to Nigeria due to crime, terrorism, unrest, kidnapping, and inconsistent availability of health care services.”²⁰⁷

Nigerian Diaspora Communities in the United States

Nigerians comprise the largest African-born population in the United States, with an estimated 530,000 foreign-born Nigerians resident in the country, per 2024 U.S. Census Bureau data.²⁰⁸ 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 most educated diaspora groups in the United States; over 60% hold a bachelor's degree or higher, per census data. 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.

There was some friction in the bilateral relationship during President Trump's first term, notably around religious persecution and U.S. visa restrictions, but Administration officials lauded Nigeria's anti-corruption efforts and took steps to expand economic and security cooperation.²⁰⁹ In a 2018 meeting with President Buhari, President Trump stated, “The United States deeply values and appreciates Nigeria's role as a strong, democratic leader in the region.”²¹⁰

Under the Biden Administration, Secretary of State Antony Blinken and President Buhari signed an agreement in 2021 setting out U.S. aid commitments worth \$2.1 billion over five years—roughly level with what USAID reported for Nigeria under a framework signed in 2015.²¹¹ President Biden met with President Tinubu on the sidelines of the 2023 G20 Summit to discuss Tinubu's domestic economic reforms and ECOWAS efforts on Niger.²¹² Secretary Blinken visited Nigeria in 2024, signaling the United States' determination to remain “a strong security partner” for Nigeria and expressing appreciation for its regional leadership regarding the Niger coup.²¹³

The detention of a U.S. citizen, Tigran Gambaryan, an executive of the cryptocurrency company Binance, caused tension in 2024. Nigerian prosecutors accused Binance of money laundering and tax evasion, and claimed Gambaryan was personally accountable for Binance's alleged role in Nigeria's economic troubles, accusing the company of enabling users to exchange the naira for foreign currencies, contributing to its devaluation.²¹⁴ U.S. officials and some Members of Congress pressed for his release, citing health concerns, but prosecutors initially resisted,

²⁰⁷ State Department, “Nigeria—Level 3: Reconsider Travel,” Travel Advisory, April 8, 2026.

²⁰⁸ CRS tabulation of data from U.S. Census Bureau, 2024 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates, “Table B05006: Place of Birth for the Foreign-Born Population in the United States.”

²⁰⁹ State Department, Secretary Pompeo Statements with Nigerian Foreign Minister Onyeama, February 4, 2020.

²¹⁰ White House, Remarks by President Trump and President Buhari in Joint Press Conference, April 30, 2018.

²¹¹ State Department, “Secretary Blinken Remarks at the Signing Ceremony for \$2.1 Billion Development Assistance Agreement with Nigerian VP Osinbajo and Foreign Minister Onyeama,” November 19, 2021; and USAID, “USAID Announces \$168.5 Million in New Assistance to Nigeria Under Development Objectives Agreement,” March 22, 2021.

²¹² White House, Readout of President Biden's Engagement with Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, September 10, 2023.

²¹³ State Department, Secretary Blinken and Foreign Minister Tuggar at a Joint Press Availability, January 24, 2024.

²¹⁴ *The Africa Report*, “Nigeria vs. Binance: What Is Behind the High-Stakes Crypto Showdown?” February 21, 2025.

accusing the United States of interfering with the judicial process.²¹⁵ He was released in late 2024. Nigeria is pursuing a legal suit against Binance for economic losses and back taxes.

The Trump Administration

Under the current Trump Administration, the State Department has stated its commitment to an “enduring partnership” with Nigeria on several occasions, described Nigeria as “an anchor of United States foreign policy in Africa,” and cited strengthening commercial ties and fostering peace and security as key areas of mutual interest.²¹⁶ Immigration issues and U.S. concerns about Christian persecution have strained ties, however, and several actions taken by the Administration, including travel restrictions, tariffs, responses to religious freedom concerns, and aid cuts have implications for the bilateral relationship. Despite tensions, security cooperation appears to be increasing under the Trump Administration, with U.S. military officials describing Nigeria as “a very willing and capable partner” in early 2026 and lauding joint operations.²¹⁷

Travel Restrictions. The State Department changed its non-immigrant visa policy for Nigeria in July 2025, limiting most non-immigrant visas for Nigerian citizens to single-entry visas valid for three months.²¹⁸ The State Department called the restrictions reciprocal; Nigerian officials linked them to Nigeria’s refusal to accept third-country deportees from the United States.²¹⁹ Nigeria’s foreign minister asserted that the United States was “mounting considerable pressure on African countries to accept Venezuelans to be deported from the US, some straight out of prisons,” but Nigeria had “enough problems” of its own.²²⁰

In December 2025, President Trump added Nigeria to a list of countries whose nationals are subject to a “partial suspension” of entry to the United States.²²¹ The entry of Nigerian nationals as immigrants and as nonimmigrants on B-1, B-2, B1/B-2, F, M, and J visas has been suspended, blocking visas for tourism, business, visiting family, students, and exchanges. U.S. consular officers have also been directed to reduce the validity period of other nonimmigrant visas for Nigerian nationals to the extent permitted by law. The President’s proclamation stated that the operations of “radical Islamic terrorist groups such as Boko Haram and the Islamic State” in Nigeria creates “substantial screening and vetting difficulties,” and noted a B-1/B-2 visa overstay rate for Nigerian nationals of 5.56% and an F, M, and J visa overstay rate of 11.9%.²²²

In January 2026, the Administration announced that Nigerian nationals would need to pay a visa “bond” to travel to the United States; the country is among 38, a majority of which are in Africa,

²¹⁵ *Wall Street Journal* (WSJ), “Lawmakers Urge Biden to Step Up Effort to Free Binance Executive Detained by Nigeria,” June 5, 2024.

²¹⁶ State Department, “Deputy Secretary Landau’s call with Nigerian Foreign Minister Tuggar,” April 4, 2025; Christopher Landau (@DeputySecState), X post, September 26, 2025; and State Department, “Nigeria National Day,” October 1, 2025.

²¹⁷ State Department, Digital Press Briefing with AFRICOM Commander Gen. Dagvin Anderson and Command Senior Enlisted Leader Sergeant Major Garric Banfield, on AFRICOM Priorities on the African Continent, February 3, 2026; Remarks by Gen. Anderson in 2026 AFRICOM Posture Hearings.

²¹⁸ U.S. Mission Nigeria, “Revised Visa Reciprocity Policy for Nigeria,” July 8, 2025.

²¹⁹ “Nigeria Says It Won’t Accept Deportees from U.S.,” NPR, July 11, 2025.

²²⁰ *Channels TV* (Lagos), “Nigeria Won’t Bow to US Pressure to Accept Venezuelan Deportees—FG,” July 10, 2025.

²²¹ White House, “Restricting and Limiting the Entry of Foreign Nationals to Protect the Security of the United States,” December 16, 2025. See also CRS Report IR10004, *Nationality-Based Immigration Restrictions*.

²²² For more on overstays, see CRS Report R47848, *Nonimmigrant Overstays: Overview and Policy Issues*, coordinated by Jill H. Wilson.

for which such bonds are now required.²²³ Nigeria is also among 75 countries from which the State Department has paused the issuance of immigrant visas, seeking to ensure that “immigrants from these high-risk countries do not utilize welfare in the United States or become a public charge.”²²⁴

Voice of America. In March 2025, the Administration moved to shut down Voice of America (VOA), which had an estimated weekly audience of over 37 million people in Nigeria—VOA’s second largest audience globally.²²⁵ The broadcast network ended its long-running Hausa language service, which had an estimated weekly audience of almost 17 million (Hausa is spoken by an estimated 60 million people in West Africa). The suspension of VOA services has occurred as China and Russia are expanding their operations in Nigeria and across Africa.²²⁶

Religious Freedom Concerns. The State Department monitors and reports on religious freedom issues in Nigeria, including through its International Religious Freedom (IRF) reports, issued pursuant to the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRFA, P.L. 105-292).²²⁷ IRF reports have cited issues affecting interfaith relations and religious liberties, including the application of sharia in the north and blasphemy charges, the repression of Shia Muslims, Islamist extremism, and intercommunal violence in the Middle Belt. The State Department has repeatedly designated Boko Haram and IS-WA, both U.S.-designated Foreign Terrorist Organizations, as “entities of particular concern” for particularly severe violations of religious freedom.²²⁸

IRFA mandates that the Administration annually designate countries whose governments engage in or tolerate “particularly severe” religious freedom violations as Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs).²²⁹ The law requires countries with severe religious freedom violations that do not reach the CPC threshold to be put on a Special Watch List. For CPCs, IRFA directs the executive branch to implement one or more sanctions outlined in the law, but it provides the executive with discretion in determining which, if any, actions to take and provides a waiver authority.

The first Trump Administration put Nigeria on the Special Watch List in 2019, and in 2020 designated the country as a CPC. The designations highlighted the killing and persecution of Christians and “the Nigerian government’s inexcusable lack of action to end faith-based violence.”²³⁰ The Trump Administration waived IRFA-mandated sanctions against Nigeria,

²²³ State Department, “Countries Subject to Visa Bonds,” January 8, 2026. Visa bonds are payments required as a condition of visa issuance; the payment, between \$5,000 and \$15,000, is reimbursed if the applicant abides by the terms of admission.

²²⁴ State Department, “Immigrant Visa Processing Updates for Nationalities at High Risk of Public Benefits Usage,” January 14, 2026.

²²⁵ White House, Continuing the Reduction of the Federal Bureaucracy, March 14, 2025; U.S. Agency for Global Media, “Audience and Impact—Overview for 2025,” February 2025; VOA, “VOA Broadcasting in Hausa to Africa.”

²²⁶ *WSJ*, “China Gets More Airtime Around the World as Voice Of America Signs Off,” July 13, 2025; China Global South Project, “CGTN to Expand African Operations,” March 25, 2025; TASS, “TASS Aims to Open News Bureaus in All African Countries, Says Director General,” November 17, 2025; and RT, “RT, Sputnik and Other Russian Media to Open Offices in Africa—Putin,” July 27, 2023.

²²⁷ For more on IRFA, see CRS In Focus IF10803, *Global Human Rights: International Religious Freedom Policy*, by Michael A. Weber.

²²⁸ The State Department first named Boko Haram an entity of particular concern in 2018 and added IS-WA in 2020. These designations are made pursuant to the Frank R. Wolf International Religious Freedom Act (P.L. 114-281).

²²⁹ The law defines particularly severe violations of religious freedom as “systematic, ongoing, and egregious” violations, including torture; cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment; prolonged detention without charges; forced disappearances; or other flagrant denial of the right to life, liberty, or the security of persons.

²³⁰ White House, Statement from the Press Secretary, December 11, 2020.

however, citing U.S. national interests.²³¹ The Biden Administration did not re-designate Nigeria as a CPC or Special Watch List country, drawing criticism from some Members of Congress and USCIRF.²³² Under the Biden Administration, the State Department missed statutory deadlines for new IRFA designations and actions against CPCs triggered by the 2023 IRF Report.²³³ The State Department has yet to release the IRF Report for 2024, which by statute was due in 2025.

President Trump announced the first IRFA designation of his second term in October 2025, stating that “Christianity is facing an existential threat in Nigeria” and declaring it a CPC.²³⁴ He posted that thousands of Nigerian Christians were being killed and warned that if the Nigerian government continued to allow it, the United States would stop all aid and “may very well go into that now disgraced country, ‘guns-a-blazing’ to completely wipe out the Islamic Terrorists who are committing these horrible atrocities.”²³⁵ In response to the President’s post “instructing our Department of War to prepare for possible action,” Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth posted, “The killing of innocent Christians in Nigeria—and anywhere—must end immediately. The Department of War is preparing for action. Either the Nigerian Government protects Christians, or we will kill the Islamic Terrorists who are committing these horrible atrocities.”²³⁶

Nigerian officials reacted with apparent alarm, and President Tinubu emphasized that Nigeria opposes religious persecution and is committed to safeguarding religious freedom and protecting communities of all faiths.²³⁷ Nigerian officials declared that they would welcome U.S. assistance against Islamist insurgents, provided U.S. actions respected Nigeria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.²³⁸ They refuted allegations of Christian genocide and argued that while Christians have been among those killed by terrorists, they do not represent the majority of fatalities.²³⁹

Prior to President Trump’s posts, Administration officials had spoken positively of Nigeria. Secretary of State Marco Rubio described Nigeria as “a beacon of resilience and leadership” and said the United States “values our enduring partnership, rooted in shared democratic principles, a growing commercial relationship, and a commitment to fostering peace and security.”²⁴⁰ The Administration’s Senior Advisor for Arab and African Affairs, Massad Boulos, met with Tinubu two weeks before President Trump’s posts, highlighting efforts to expand trade and investment

²³¹ 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.

²³² See for example Letter from Sens. Hawley, Lankford, Cramer, Braun, Inhofe, Cotton, and Rubio to Secretary Blinken, December 13, 2021; Rep. Chris Smith, “Biden’s Retreat from the Noble and Necessary Fight to Protect Victims of Religious Persecution in Nigeria,” November 23, 2021; USCIRF, “USCIRF Appalled at Administration’s Removal of Nigeria from List of Violators of Religious Freedom,” November 17, 2021.

²³³ The Secretary of State is mandated to make designations within 90 days of the IRF Report release and take sanctions actions within 90 days of a designation. In practice, designations and actions often come within roughly 180 days.

²³⁴ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social post, October 31, 2025, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115470116607441456>.

²³⁵ Donald Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social posts on October 31, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115470116607441456>, and November 1, 2025, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115476385101120405>.

²³⁶ Pete Hegseth (@PeteHegseth), X post, November 1, 2025, <https://x.com/PeteHegseth/status/1984751436102791607>. Secretary Hegseth uses “Secretary of War” as a secondary title per Executive Order 14347.

²³⁷ “A Truth Social Threat and a Scramble in Nigeria to Avert Military Action,” *Wall Street Journal*, November 8, 2025; State House, “Nigeria Stands Firmly as a Democracy Governed by Constitutional Guarantees of Religious Liberty,” November 1, 2025.

²³⁸ Reuters, “Nigeria Says US Help Against Islamist Insurgents Must Respect Its Sovereignty,” November 3, 2025.

²³⁹ *Al Jazeera*, “Nigeria Rejects Claims of Christian Genocide as Trump Mulls Military Action,” November 2, 2025.

²⁴⁰ Secretary of State Marco Rubio, “Nigeria National Day,” October 1, 2025.

and emphasizing close coordination on counterterrorism efforts.²⁴¹ When asked about Christian persecution in Nigeria, Boulos expressed concern about extremist violence but said “Boko Haram and ISIS are killing more Muslims than Christians.” He refuted claims that farmer-herder conflict specifically targeted Christians and noted efforts by Tinubu’s government to improve security.

Remarks by U.S. officials became more critical after the CPC designation. In November 2025, the State Department’s senior Africa official told Congress that “the scale and brutality of violence facing Christian communities” represented a “serious failing” on the part of Nigerian authorities, suggesting the government had not done enough to combat violence in the Middle Belt or protect Christian communities.²⁴² The Administration’s approach, he testified, was to “raise the protection of Christians to the top of the government of Nigeria’s priorities, especially in the Middle Belt,” by considering U.S. sanctions and military engagement to “incentivize and compel the Nigerian government to better protect Christian communities and improve religious freedom.” Also in November, U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations Mike Waltz hosted an event on religious violence in Nigeria and described violence in the Middle Belt as “genocide.”²⁴³ Days later, Secretary Hegseth hinted at a more collaborative approach when, during a visit by senior Nigerian officials, he stated that his department was “working aggressively with Nigeria to end the persecution of Christians by jihadist terrorists.”²⁴⁴

In early December 2025, the State Department announced a new policy under Section 212(a)(3)(C) of the Immigration and Nationality Act that enables the department to restrict visas for individuals who have engaged in violations of religious freedom and their family members. While the policy applies globally, the State Department’s announcement of it stated a particular focus on countering “anti-Christian violence” in Nigeria.²⁴⁵

U.S. Military Operations

On December 25, 2025, President Trump announced that the United States had launched strikes in Nigeria against Islamic State targets, which he declared had been “targeting and viciously killing, primarily, innocent Christians, at levels not seen for many years, and even Centuries! I have previously warned these Terrorists that if they did not stop the slaughtering of Christians, there would be hell to pay, and tonight, there was.”²⁴⁶ He warned of further action if killings continued. By some accounts the strikes were timed to occur on Christmas Day.²⁴⁷ The strikes were the first known U.S. strikes in Nigeria and the first U.S. military operation there since 2020, when U.S. Special Forces rescued a U.S. citizen held in Nigeria after being kidnapped in Niger.

The U.S. strikes were conducted in coordination with Nigerian authorities, per U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM) and Nigerian officials, who reported that they targeted “locations being used as assembly and staging grounds by foreign ISIS elements infiltrating Nigeria from the

²⁴¹ Senior Advisor for Arab and African Affairs Massad Boulos (@US_SrAdvisorAF), X post, October 18, 2025; *TVC News Nigeria*, “There’s No Religious Genocide in Nigeria, Trumps Advisor, Massad Boulos, Says,” October 17, 2025.

²⁴² HFAC Subcommittee on Africa, *President Trump’s Redesignation of Nigeria as a “Country of Particular Concern-CPC”: A Serious, Well-Founded Wake-Up Call*, hearing, November 20, 2025

²⁴³ U.S. Mission to the United Nations, Remarks at a U.S. Hosted Event on ‘Combatting Religious Violence and the Killing of Christians in Nigeria,’ November 18, 2025.

²⁴⁴ Secretary of War Pete Hegseth (@SecWar), X post, November 21, 2025.

²⁴⁵ State Department, “Combating Egregious Anti-Christian Violence in Nigeria and Globally,” December 3, 2025.

²⁴⁶ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social post, December 25, 2025, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/115782683955516402>. See also “Highlights from the Times’ Interview with President Trump,” *New York Times*, January 8, 2026.

²⁴⁷ *NYT*, “How Trump Took up the ‘Christian Genocide’ Cause in Nigeria,” February 1, 2026.

Sahel region, in collaboration with local affiliates, to plan and execute large-scale terrorist attacks within Nigerian territory.”²⁴⁸

Per an initial AFRICOM assessment, “multiple ISIS terrorists were killed” in the attack.²⁴⁹ Press reports have raised questions about the targets and whether the strikes—reportedly involving over a dozen Tomahawk cruise missiles launched from a U.S. Navy ship in the Gulf of Guinea—were successful.²⁵⁰ Some observers noted that a majority of the victims of violence in Sokoto State, where the strikes hit, are Muslim, rather than Christian, and some expressed skepticism that the strikes would deter attacks against Christians.²⁵¹ The Administration did not publicly identify which regional IS affiliate was targeted, but the location and Nigerian statements suggest that IS-Sahel and/or affiliated Lakurawa militants were the intended target, rather than IS-WA.²⁵²

The Trump Administration has increased intelligence and military cooperation with Nigeria since late 2025, reportedly deploying roughly 200 U.S. military personnel in early 2026 to train and advise Nigerian forces. The deployment augmented a small U.S. team that was already in the country to provide intelligence support. U.S. and Nigerian officials said in February 2026 that the U.S. personnel being deployed would not be involved in combat.²⁵³

On May 16, 2026, the U.S. military conducted another operation in Nigeria, in coordination with Nigerian forces, to eliminate Abu Bilal al Mainuki, whom the President termed “the most active terrorist in the world” and “second in command of ISIS globally.”²⁵⁴ Mainuki, who the State Department sanctioned as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist in 2023 for his role as “a Sahel-based” senior leader of the IS GDP al Furqan office, has been described by AFRICOM as “the director of global operations for ISIS” and as having “provided strategic guidance to the ISIS global network on media and financial operations as well as the development and manufacturing of weapons, explosives and drones.”²⁵⁵ The joint operation, reportedly involved U.S. Special Operations commandos and airstrikes, and was conducted on two islands in Lake Chad.²⁵⁶

While U.S. officials have described Mainuki as the second-most senior leader for ISIS globally, others have debated Mainuki’s role within IS-WA and where he ranked in IS leadership.²⁵⁷

²⁴⁸ Nigerian Federal Ministry of Information and National Orientation, “FG: Successful Precision Strikes on Foreign ISIS Elements Approved by President Bola Ahmed Tinubu,” December 26, 2025.

²⁴⁹ AFRICOM, “U.S. Africa Command Conducts Strike Against ISIS in Nigeria,” December 25, 2025.

²⁵⁰ “Unexploded Missiles, Witnesses Undercut Trump Account of Nigeria Strike,” *Washington Post*, January 10, 2026; *HumAngle*, “The Performative US Airstrike That May Have Killed No Terrorists in Nigeria,” January 10, 2026; and *TNH*, “Did the US Military Strikes in Nigeria Hit the Right Target?” January 12, 2026.

²⁵¹ See, inter alia, “In Northwest Nigeria, U.S. Confronts a Growing Terrorist Threat,” *Washington Post*, February 5, 2026.

²⁵² AFP, “U.S. Strikes Targeted IS Militants, Lakurawa Jihadists, Nigeria Says,” December 27, 2025.

²⁵³ *WSJ*, “U.S. to Send 200 Troops to Help Nigeria Fight Islamist Insurgents,” February 10, 2026; *Stars and Stripes*, “US Military Deploys Team to Nigeria to Assist in Fight Against ISIS,” February 3, 2026.

²⁵⁴ AFRICOM, “ISIS Number Two Killed in Nigeria,” May 16, 2026; Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social post, May 15, 2026, <https://truthsocial.com/@realDonaldTrump/posts/116582139808210458>; and Pete Hegseth (@PeteHegseth), X post, May 16, 2026, <https://x.com/PeteHegseth/status/2055597053598703994>.

²⁵⁵ AFRICOM, “ISIS Number Two Killed in Nigeria,” State Department, “Terrorist Designation of ISIS General Directorate of Provinces Leaders,” June 8, 2023.

²⁵⁶ “Trump Says a Top ISIS Leader Was Killed in a U.S. Nigerian Mission,” *New York Times*, May 16, 2026.

²⁵⁷ The Nigerian military claimed it killed IS-WA emir Habib Yusuf (aka Abu Musab al Barnawi) in 2021, but he reportedly survived. By some accounts he died in 2023; other reports suggest he left Nigeria and deputized Mainuki. On differing analyses about Mainuki’s position, see e.g., Alex Thurston, “‘Abu-Bilal al-Minuki’ and the Structural Ambiguities of Killing Top Jihadists,” *Sawahil Blog*, May 18, 2026; UNIDIR, “Boko Haram: Mapping an Evolving Armed Constellation,” September 2024; GGA, “Unseen Advances, Quiet Offensives”; and *HumAngle*, “Ideology, Blood, and War: Rethinking the Origins of Boko Haram,” April 23, 2026.

AFRICOM has since conducted additional airstrikes targeting IS militants in Nigeria, to diminish “the group’s capacity to plan attacks that threaten the safety and security of the U.S. and our partners.”²⁵⁸ AFRICOM’s commander has testified that the U.S. strikes “set back the ISIS network significantly globally.”²⁵⁹ It is unclear if these operations are part of a limited mission or if they may lead to a more persistent U.S. military role in the country.

Legal Issues. The Trump Administration has cited as the legal framework for its use of force in Nigeria the 2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF; P.L. 107-40; 50 U.S.C. §1541 note), which Congress passed after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks against the United States.²⁶⁰ According to the White House, the objective of the December operation was to “degrade ISIS capability, protect Nigerian civilians, and defend American lives at home and abroad.”²⁶¹ Successive U.S. presidential administrations have interpreted the 2001 AUMF as authorizing operations against not only Al Qaeda but also the Islamic State. Some Members of Congress have expressed concern with this interpretation, which they view as more expansive and open-ended than Congress intended: some have sought to repeal the 2001 AUMF and some have sought to replace it with a new, narrower authorization.²⁶²

Nigerian Efforts. The Tinubu Administration has undertaken various initiatives to address security gaps, some predating President Trump’s engagement. Tinubu’s government has surged more resources to the security sector and pursued efforts to boost troop protection and improve intelligence and battlefield effectiveness.²⁶³ Nigeria graduated 7,000 Forest Guards in late 2025 under a program launched earlier in the year to reclaim several forests from being used as cover by jihadists, bandits, and other criminal elements.²⁶⁴ In a stated effort to strengthen Nigeria’s national security architecture, President Tinubu replaced the military service chiefs and chief of defense staff in October 2025.²⁶⁵ After a series of mass abductions in November, Tinubu declared a national security emergency and ordered the army and police to increase recruitment.²⁶⁶

U.S. and Nigerian officials have established a U.S.-Nigeria Working Group to address the CPC designation. They met for the first time in early 2026 to discuss areas for cooperation to improve religious freedom and bolster security across Nigeria. U.S. officials have welcomed “Nigeria’s realignment of resources to address insecurity, particularly in North Central states” and thanked Nigeria “for their urgent actions to strengthen security for at risk Christian communities and

²⁵⁸ See e.g., AFRICOM press statements, May 18 and 19, 2026.

²⁵⁹ House Armed Services Committee (HASC), *U.S. Military Posture and National Security Challenges in the Greater Middle East and Africa*, hearing, May 19, 2026.

²⁶⁰ For more on the AUMF, see CRS Report R43983, *2001 Authorization for Use of Military Force: Issues Concerning Its Continued Application*, by Matthew C. Weed; CRS In Focus IF13134, *Understanding the War Powers Resolution* and CRS Report R43760, *A New Authorization for Use of Military Force Against the Islamic State: Issues and Current Proposals*, by Matthew C. Weed.

²⁶¹ White House, *Report on the Legal and Policy Frameworks for the United States’ Use of Military Force and Related National Security Operations*, February 2026.

²⁶² See for example HFAC, *Syria at a Crossroads: U.S. Policy Challenges Post-Assad*, hearing, February 10, 2026; HFAC, “Meeks Introduces Landmark 2001 AUMF Repeal and Replace Bill, April 7, 2023; and Sen. Tim Kaine, “Kaine Statement on the 19th Anniversary of 2001 AUMF, Drone Strike Authorities in Kenya,” September 18, 2020.

²⁶³ BudgIT Foundation, “Budget Surge, Security Plunge: Nigeria’s Costly Crisis of Accountability,” April 22, 2026; State House, “We’re Mobilising All Military Assets to Protect Nigerians, Crush Security Threats,” December 15, 2025.

²⁶⁴ Nigerian Ministry of Information, “FG Graduates over 7,000 Forest Guards, Set for Immediate Deployment,” December 27, 2025; *DW*, “Why Extremists Take Cover in Nigeria’s Forests,” January 26, 2026.

²⁶⁵ State House, “President Tinubu Changes Service Chiefs,” October 24, 2025.

²⁶⁶ State House, “President Tinubu Declares a Security Emergency, Orders Army, Police to Recruit More Personnel,” November 26, 2025.

Nigerians of all faiths whose safety is put in jeopardy by violence and terrorism.”²⁶⁷ U.S. officials have described the Nigerian government as “broadly responsive to our asks” since the CPC designation and noted positive steps such as leadership changes in the security forces, new security deployments, and increased prosecutions.²⁶⁸ In June 2026 testimony, Secretary Rubio asserted that, regarding Nigerian authorities, “in many cases, what was happening there was not a lack of willingness on their part; it was a lack of capability. In essence, they were confronting groups that in many cases had better weapons.... [T]hey were facing a real domestic challenge.”²⁶⁹ He described cooperation between the United States and Nigeria as a success story.

U.S. Assistance

Nigeria ranked among the top 10 U.S. foreign aid recipients globally for much of the past two decades, with over \$1 billion in U.S. annual assistance obligations in FY2022 and FY2023 and over \$930 million in FY2024.²⁷⁰ The United States has routinely been the country’s largest humanitarian donor. Health assistance regularly constituted the largest share of non-humanitarian aid, with other assistance—prior to 2025—focused on economic growth, basic education, governance and civil society, and peace and security. Nigeria was a focus country for Feed the Future (FTF), an agricultural development initiative led by USAID. U.S. democracy, human rights, and governance aid for Nigeria aimed to help strengthen political competition and democratic institutions, mitigate conflict, support civil society, and strengthen the justice sector.

The Trump Administration’s pause and ensuing termination of many U.S. foreign aid programs and its shutdown of USAID have affected programs in Nigeria.²⁷¹ The Administration has not publicly released country-level details on cuts or ongoing programs, but dozens of programs in Nigeria were terminated.²⁷² The State Department did not include country-specific proposals for Africa in its FY2026 or FY2027 budget requests. The Administration has identified “commercial diplomacy” as the cornerstone of its approach to Africa, and the U.S. ambassador to Nigeria said in 2025 that the United States is “making a shift: from aid to trade ... we will continue to invest in development—but we will do so through expanded trade and private investment.”²⁷³

Health Assistance. Over the past decade, health assistance routinely constituted about 90% of annual bilateral U.S. aid to Nigeria. A large portion of this aid supported HIV/AIDS programs through the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which provided, among other interventions, antiretroviral therapy (ART) for over 1.6 million people annually—a majority

²⁶⁷ U.S. Mission Nigeria, “Joint Statement at the End of the First Session of the US-Nigeria Joint Working Group to Address Nigeria’s Country of Particular Concern Designation,” January 22, 2026.

²⁶⁸ Remarks by State Department Senior Bureau Official for African Affairs Nick Checker in Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) Africa Subcommittee, *The U.S. Approach to Counterterrorism in Africa*, hearing, April 21, 2026.

²⁶⁹ House Appropriations Subcommittee on National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs (NSRP), *Fiscal Year 2027 Department of State Budget Request*, hearing, June 2, 2026.

²⁷⁰ For aid obligations, see foreignassistance.gov. See also State Department, “The United States and Nigeria: Partnering for Prosperity,” January 23, 2024. Other aid information is from annual State Department budget request documents.

²⁷¹ See CRS Insight IN12567, *The Trump Administration’s Foreign Assistance Review: Nuts and Bolts Issues and Congress’s Role*, by Nick M. Brown; Reuters, “Trump Aid Cuts Deal a Blow to HIV Prevention in Africa,” June 20, 2025; and KFF, “The Trump Administration’s Foreign Aid Review: Status of PEPFAR,” June 10, 2025.

²⁷² *Politico*, “Documents Reveal Scope of Trump’s Foreign Aid Cuts,” March 26, 2025; CGD, “USAID Cuts: New Estimates at the Country Level,” March 26, 2025; and Mercy Corps, “When Aid Disappears: The Human Cost of Foreign Aid Cuts,” April 1, 2025.

²⁷³ State Department, “Remarks for Launch of Bureau of African Affairs Commercial Diplomacy Strategy,” May 14, 2025; U.S. Mission Nigeria, Remarks by Ambassador Mills at the Lagos Business School Fireside Chat, June 5, 2025.

of Nigeria's estimated two million people living with HIV.²⁷⁴ Tuberculosis control efforts under PEPFAR supported over 1.8 million Nigerians with integrated TB/HIV services. The President's Malaria Initiative (PMI), which like PEPFAR was established under President George W. Bush, has been another longstanding focus of health assistance (malaria is among Nigeria's leading causes of death; in 2024 Nigeria accounted for almost a quarter of malaria cases globally).²⁷⁵ U.S. health aid has also targeted maternal and child health, water and sanitation, and nutrition. According to press reports and implementer accounts, PEPFAR and PMI programs were affected by the U.S. funding pause, and while Administration officials have said most PEPFAR assistance continues, some PEPFAR and PMI programs in Nigeria were cut.²⁷⁶ In July 2025, as USAID was shutting down, then-U.S. Ambassador Richard Mills thanked his USAID colleagues and stated, "Your tireless efforts have transformed lives, from delivering critical health and education programs to empowering communities with hope and opportunity. As USAID's work at the mission concludes, let me assure you—the life-saving programs you've built will continue, sustained through our enduring partnership with Nigeria."²⁷⁷

After U.S. foreign aid was initially frozen in early 2025, Nigeria's parliament approved \$200 million to "fill the gap created by the U.S. Government's suspension of intervention to the health sector," with much of that amount intended for vaccines and treatment for epidemic diseases.²⁷⁸

In December 2025, the State Department announced a bilateral health cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Nigeria aimed at strengthening its health system as part of the Trump Administration's America First Global Health Strategy.²⁷⁹ Under the deal, one of over 30 signed to date with partner countries, the United States would provide \$2.1 billion in global health funding for Nigeria over the next five years, while Nigeria's government would increase domestic health expenditures by \$3 billion over the same period, assuming greater financial responsibility as U.S. support decreases. The Nigeria MOU has the largest co-investment commitment (in dollar terms) of any country under the new framework, as well as the largest U.S. funding commitment to date.²⁸⁰ The agreement with Nigeria "places a strong emphasis on Christian faith-based healthcare providers," per the State Department, which also stated that "The MOU was negotiated in connection with reforms undertaken by the Government of Nigeria to

²⁷⁴ Unless otherwise indicated, all PEPFAR- and PMI-related statistics in this section are drawn from U.S. Mission Nigeria, "U.S.-Nigeria Partnership in Health," February 28, 2024. HIV statistics for Nigeria are drawn from the World Health Organization's HIV Country Profile for 2025.

²⁷⁵ USAID and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), President's Malaria Initiative: Nigeria Country Fact Sheet (February 2024), available via reliefweb.int. On PMI under the current Administration, see KFF, "The President's Malaria Initiative and Other U.S. Government Global Malaria Efforts," March 23, 2026. See also Severe Malaria Observatory, "Nigeria," at <https://www.severemalaria.org/countries/nigeria>.

²⁷⁶ Reuters, "Trump Aid Cuts Deal a Blow to HIV Prevention in Africa," June 20, 2025; UNAIDS, "Impact of US funding cuts on HIV programmes in Nigeria," March 27, 2025; KFF, "The Trump Administration's Foreign Aid Review: Status of PEPFAR," June 10, 2025; HFAC, "FY2026 State Department Posture," hearing, May 21, 2025; Reuters, "With US Aid Slashed, Nigerian HIV Volunteers Went Door-to-Door to Keep Patients Alive," April 1, 2026.

²⁷⁷ U.S. Embassy in Nigeria, Ambassador Richard Mills Jr.—U.S. National Day Remarks, July 2, 2025.

²⁷⁸ AP, "Nigerian Lawmakers Approve \$200 Million To Offset Shortfall From US Health Cuts," February 14, 2025.

²⁷⁹ For more, see State Department, *America First Global Health Strategy*, September 2025 and "America First Global Health Strategy—Bilateral Agreements on Global Health Cooperation,"

²⁸⁰ Think Global Health, "Tracking the 'America First' Bilateral Health Agreements," April 28, 2026; KFF Tracker: America First MOU Bilateral Global Health Agreements, April 27, 2026.

prioritize the protection of Christian populations from extremist violence.”²⁸¹ Some Nigerians have raised concerns about the deal related to patient privacy and data access.²⁸²

Humanitarian Assistance. U.S. aid cuts have affected humanitarian operations in Nigeria. Donor funding cuts by the United States and others have led aid agencies to scale down food, nutrition, and other assistance, including for those affected by violence in the northeast, and some reports suggest U.S. cuts may have contributed to preventable deaths.²⁸³ The United Nations has revised its aid targets globally in response to what it termed “the most devastating funding cuts that our sector has ever seen,” citing U.S. cuts and reduced funding from other major donors.²⁸⁴ The World Food Program (WFP), which in 2025 closed half of its nutrition clinics in the northeast due to funding gaps, reports that areas where food aid was suspended due to funding shortfalls are the hardest hit by the country’s worsening hunger crisis in 2026.²⁸⁵ Of 6.2 million people acutely food insecure in the northeast, WFP says it only has enough funding to support 740,000 of them.

The United States remains Nigeria’s largest humanitarian donor with \$125 million committed to date in 2026, which the State Department has provided through a pooled fund managed by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).²⁸⁶ In the past decade, the United States has routinely provided over \$300 million annually in humanitarian aid for Nigeria, but such aid appears to have dropped to under \$100 million in 2025.²⁸⁷

Development and Other Foreign Assistance. Beyond health and humanitarian aid, U.S. foreign assistance for Nigeria long funded programs that aimed to foster agricultural productivity and economic growth, support basic education, promote religious freedom, mitigate conflict, bolster democracy, and strengthen the rule of law.²⁸⁸ Most of these programs were reportedly terminated in 2025 or allowed to expire. The termination of several programs that sought to foster peace and mitigate violence in the Middle Belt drew congressional attention in a late 2025 House hearing: among them was an early warning system to deter intercommunal attacks in areas such as Yelwata, a farming village in central Benue State where over 150 people were killed in a June 2025 attack.²⁸⁹

²⁸¹ State Department, “Expanding Faith-Based Healthcare in Nigeria Through the America First Global Health Strategy,” December 20, 2025.

²⁸² Financial Times, “Donald Trump Reboots Foreign Aid with Cash-for-Data Strategy,” May 22, 2026; Premium Times, “Nigerian Govt Sued Over Deal to Share Citizens’ Health Data with US,” March 19, 2026.

²⁸³ Reuters, “Hunger Grows in Nigeria as Aid Cuts Reduce Food Supplies”; “Malnutrition Centers Close amid Nigerian Food Crisis,” NPR, July 30, 2025; CNN, “A US-funded Nutrition Program Was Helping to Keep This Woman’s Baby Alive. Days After the Program Was Cut, He Died.” September 21, 2025; Reuters, “At Least 652 Children Died from Malnutrition in Nigeria in Last Six Months, MSF says,” July 25, 2025.

²⁸⁴ OCHA, *Global Humanitarian Overview 2025—The Cruel Math of Aid Cuts*, June 2025.

²⁸⁵ “Conflict and Shrinking Humanitarian Assistance Drives Northern Nigeria Hunger Crisis to Levels Not Seen in Nearly a Decade,” WFP, July 2, 2026; “WFP Country Brief, September 2025” November 13, 2025, and “As Hunger Soars in Northeastern Nigeria, WFP Funds Dry Up,” August 5, 2025; and UNICEF Nigeria, “Lives on Hold,” August 19, 2025.

²⁸⁶ On the State Department’s new OCHA pooled fund approach, see State Department, “More Lives Saved for Fewer Taxpayer Dollars: Trump Administration Leads ‘Humanitarian Reset in the United Nations,’” December 29, 2025.

²⁸⁷ The Administration has not publicly reported 2025 or 2026 humanitarian aid data at the country level beyond what is available on foreignassistance.gov. See also donor data reported on OCHA’s Financial Tracking Service.

²⁸⁸ U.S. Embassy and Consulate in Nigeria, *United States Spent \$15 Million; Trained Over 46,000 in Dispute Resolution for Northern and Middle-Belt Region*, April 23, 2024.

²⁸⁹ HFAC, *President Trump’s Redesignation of Nigeria as a “Country of Particular Concern-CPC”* hearing; Devex, “The Cuts That Bleed: What Happens When Peace Programs Go Dark,” October 30, 2025; *Los Angeles Times*, “Trump Cut Nigeria’s Aid Back in March. Now He Wonders Why It’s So Violent,” November 17, 2025; and NPR, “We Are Being Driven from the Land.”

Flagship education programs were terminated, reportedly resulting in school closures in conflict zones, as were democracy programs, including those related to the 2027 elections.²⁹⁰

Security Cooperation. The United States has worked with Nigeria to strengthen the country's counterterrorism, maritime, and border security capacities, professionalize its military, build its law enforcement capacity, and strengthen the governance of its security sector.²⁹¹ U.S. assistance has also supported counter-drug and wildlife trafficking programs and defense institution development. Nigeria was a member of the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP), a State Department-led effort to build counterterrorism capabilities in North and West Africa that the Trump Administration has terminated. The Department of Defense (DOD), which is using "Department of War" as a secondary designation under Executive Order 14347, has notified Congress of over \$150 million in support for Nigerian forces under its "global train and equip" authority (now 10 U.S.C. §333) since FY2006. Such programs have supported military intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance; air-to-ground integration; and maritime security and counterterrorism capacities, including unmanned aircraft systems. The U.S. Coast Guard has partnered with Nigerian maritime authorities to strengthen port security conditions, and the California National Guard, which has been paired with Nigeria in the National Guard State Partnership Program for two decades, has engaged with Nigerian forces in various programs, including special forces training. Nigeria participates in military exercises with the United States.

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 U.S. assistance.²⁹² From 2015 to 2018 and 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 the military's use of children, generally in support roles.²⁹³ That designation triggers restrictions on U.S. security assistance, subject to a waiver; successive Administrations fully waived the restrictions for Nigeria, citing U.S. interests.

Military Sales and Transfers. Nigeria is the top purchaser of U.S. arms in sub-Saharan Africa and has made major purchases under the Foreign Military Sales (FMS) program, including a 2017 deal for 12 A-29 "Super Tucano" light attack aircraft, worth over \$500 million, and a 2022 deal for 12 AH-1Z Cobra attack helicopters, worth almost \$1 billion.²⁹⁴ Those sales, which were initially held up due to U.S. human rights concerns, are, to date, the largest FMS cases in Sub-Saharan Africa. The deals supported improvements to a Nigerian air base to house the A-29s and the acquisition of munitions and rocket propellants, unmanned aircraft, targeting systems, bomb

²⁹⁰ "USAID's Aid Freeze, Implications for Nigeria's Education Sector, Country Responses, and New Roles for External Partners," Brookings Institute, April 17, 2026; Global Democracy Ecosystem, *When Aid Fades: Impacts and Pathways for the Global Democracy Ecosystem*, November 2025.

²⁹¹ Per a January 2024 State Department fact sheet, "The United States and Nigeria: Partnering for Prosperity," U.S. security cooperation since 2017 totaled over \$650 million, a figure for which a public breakdown is not available. A January 20, 2025 fact sheet, "U.S. Security Cooperation with Nigeria," did not repeat the \$650 million figure, but cited \$5 million in International Military Education and Training (IMET) from FY2019 to FY2023, \$8 million in support through the Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Partnership (TSCTP) from FY2019 to FY2023, \$1.8 million in Foreign Military Financing (FMF) from FY2016 to FY2020, and several other smaller security assistance allocations. See also State Department [Biden Administration], "Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs: Nigeria Summary."

²⁹² See HFAC Subcommittee on Africa, Global Health, Global Human Rights, and International Organizations, *Human Rights Vetting: Nigeria and Beyond*, hearing, 114th Cong., 2nd sess., July 10, 2014.

²⁹³ See State Department Trafficking in Persons and human right reports for 2015-2018, 2020, and 2021.

²⁹⁴ Defense Security Cooperation Agency (DSCA), "Nigeria—A-29 Super Tucano Aircraft, Weapons, and Associated Support," August 3, 2017, and "Nigeria—AH-1Z Attack Helicopter Related FMS Acquisitions," April 14, 2022.

equipment, and surveillance systems. In August 2025, the State Department approved a \$346 million arms sale to help Nigeria counter terrorist groups and illicit trafficking.²⁹⁵ The United States has also provided materiel to Nigeria under the Excess Defense Articles (EDA) program, including Coast Guard cutters and armored vehicles.

Congressional Engagement

Congressional engagement on Nigeria over the past two decades has been wide-ranging. Boko Haram's rise and the Chibok kidnapping galvanized congressional action and spurred hearings and legislation in the group's early years, and concern about terrorist activity in Nigeria and the Lake Chad Basin has persisted. Other human rights concerns, including with respect to religious freedom, have also spurred congressional activity, as discussed below. Nigeria's elections have drawn some congressional attention and often prompt legislation.²⁹⁶ Trade and commercial ties, China's role in the region, and diaspora links are areas of interest for some Members. U.S. foreign aid programs in Nigeria have routinely been subject to congressional oversight and deliberations.

Human rights abuses by Nigerian security forces and civilian casualty incidents from airstrikes have sometimes drawn concern from Members of Congress, and have impeded some U.S. arms sales.²⁹⁷ Some Members expressed concern over the A-29 and Cobra helicopter sales, though they ultimately proceeded, with the A-29 case including training to mitigate the risk of civilian harm incidents.²⁹⁸ In raising concern about the helicopter sale, some Members cited reports suggesting that Nigeria's military had intentionally killed children during counterterrorism operations and conducted a secret mass forced abortion program in the northeast among female detainees impregnated by Islamist militants.²⁹⁹ Human Rights Watch urged congressional attention to the 2025 FMS case (which involves the sale of munitions, precision bombs, and precision rockets), calling for safeguards to ensure compliance with U.S. and international human rights laws.³⁰⁰ In the 118th Congress, a proposed amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for FY2024 (H.R. 2670) would have required the Secretary of State to report on efforts to urge accountability for civilian casualties and human rights abuses by Nigeria's armed forces. It was not adopted.

Christian persecution. There has been increased focus in the 119th Congress on Christian persecution and anti-Christian violence in Nigeria, and in testimony before Congress, Secretary Rubio has credited Members with elevating the issue.³⁰¹ Some Members had pressed for Nigeria's

²⁹⁵ DSCA, "Nigeria—Munitions, Precision Bombs, and Precision Rockets," August 13, 2025.

²⁹⁶ See for example S.Res. 36 and H.Res. 143 in the 118th Congress.

²⁹⁷ On abuses, see annual State Department *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices*. On the Obama Administration decision to block the transfer of U.S.-origin attack helicopters from Israel to Nigeria in 2014, see State Department, Daily Press Briefing, November 12, 2014.

²⁹⁸ The A-29s were notified in 2017 at a value of \$593 million and delivered in 2021; the AH-1Z sale was notified in 2022 at a value of \$997 million. On concerns, see Letter from Sens. Cory Booker and Rand Paul to Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, June 8, 2017; "U.S. Lawmakers Hold Up Major Proposed Arms Sale to Nigeria," *Foreign Policy*, July 27, 2021; "US State Department Approves \$1 Billion Sale to Nigeria, Delayed over Human Rights Concerns," *Defense News*, April 14, 2022; and "US Lawmakers Want Nigeria Helicopter Sale Rescinded," AFP, February 17, 2023.

²⁹⁹ Rep. Sara Jacobs, "Reps. Sara Jacobs, Chris Smith Push Biden Administration to Rescind \$1 Billion Arms Deal with Nigeria," February 15, 2023; Reuters, "Smothered, Poisoned and Shot," December 12, 2022 and "The Abortion Assault," December 7, 2022.

³⁰⁰ HRW, "US-Nigeria Weapons Sale Requires Rights Safeguards," August 19, 2025.

³⁰¹ The HFAC Subcommittee on Africa has held multiple related hearings in the 119th Congress, including *Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The Case for a CPC Designation*, March 12, 2025; *President Trump's Redesignation of Nigeria as a 'Country of Particular Concern—CPC'*, November 20, 2025; and *Defending Religious Freedom Around* (continued...)

redesignation as a CPC and have praised President Trump's actions; some accuse Nigeria's government of ignoring, downplaying, or being complicit in violence against Christians.³⁰² Some Members assert that Christians in Nigeria are facing genocide, and some describe Fulani herders as "terrorists."³⁰³ Other Members argue that the CPC designation "ignores the complex reality of violence" in Nigeria and have criticized the Administration's aid cuts in Nigeria, highlighting the termination of programs to mitigate violence and promote interfaith relations.³⁰⁴ Reactions to recent U.S. engagement on Christian persecution in Nigeria among Nigerian church leaders and civic groups have been mixed: some have welcomed U.S. attention to the issue, but some have raised concerns about a negative impact on interfaith coexistence and peacebuilding efforts.³⁰⁵

The House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa held two hearings on religious persecution in Nigeria in 2025. Some Majority Members of the House Appropriations Committee and the House Foreign Affairs Committee held a joint briefing on the topic in December and traveled to Nigeria; they issued a set of recommendations for the White House in early 2026, seeking to "redefine" the bilateral relationship to incorporate a greater emphasis on religious freedom and protecting Christians.³⁰⁶ Legislation introduced during the 119th Congress on religious freedom concerns in Nigeria includes H.Res. 220, H.Res. 594, S. 2747, H.R. 5808, H.Res. 860, H.Res. 866; and H.R. 7457. Related legislation in the 118th Congress included H.Res. 82.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2026 (P.L. 119-75) includes a new provision on Nigeria that restricts the obligation of 50% of any bilateral economic or security assistance funds made available for Nigeria's government until the Secretary of State certifies that it is taking effective steps to prevent and respond to violence and hold perpetrators accountable; prioritizing resources to support victims of violence; facilitating the safe return, resettlement, and reconstruction of communities impacted by violence; and allocating sufficient resources toward these issues. The provision states that any economic or security assistance for Nigeria shall be made on cost-matching bases as practicable and shall prioritize seven stated objectives, including atrocity prevention and advancing religious freedom. The House version of the FY2027 National Security, Department of State, and Related Programs Appropriations Bill (H.R. 8595) includes a similar provision. The FY2026 law requires the State Department to report and directs the Comptroller General to conduct an audit of all U.S. foreign aid to Nigeria in the past five fiscal years.

U.S. military operations and an expanding U.S. military presence in Nigeria raise potential questions for Congress, including with respect to the use of force and the posture of U.S. forces deployed to the country. Some Members have expressed concern about U.S. military

the World, February 4, 2026. See Secretary Rubio's remarks in House Appropriations NSRP Subcommittee, *Fiscal Year 2027 Department of State Budget Request*, hearing, June 2, 2026.

³⁰² See for example Rep. Bill Huizenga, "Huizenga, Smith Introduce Measure to Help End the Persecution and Killing of Christians in Nigeria," November 6, 2025; Sen. Ted Cruz (@SenTedCruz), X post, October 3, 2025.

³⁰³ Rep. Chris Smith, "Smith Speaks Out for Persecuted Nigerian Christians," March 25, 2025; Rep. Riley Moore, "'Genocide Can't Be Ignored': GOP Lawmaker Backs Trump's Threat of Military Action in Nigeria," November 10, 2025; HFAC Subcommittee on Africa, "Conflict and Persecution in Nigeria: The Case for a CPC Designation," March 12, 2025; HFAC, "Africa Subcommittee Chairman Chris Smith Delivers Opening Remarks at Hearing on Defending Religious Freedom Around the World," February 4, 2026.

³⁰⁴ HFAC, "Meeks, Jacobs Condemn Trump's Threat of Aid Cuts and Military Action in Nigeria," November 3, 2025.

³⁰⁵ See, for example, "Nigerian Church Leaders Have Mixed Reaction to Trump Threat of Action to Protect Christians," November 4, 2025, *National Catholic Reporter*; "Nigerian Christian Leader Calls Trump's Spotlight on Violence in Nigeria an 'Answered Prayer,'" Fox News, November 12, 2025; and "Peacebuilding Actors Say 'Christian Genocide' Rhetoric Is Eroding Their Work in Nigeria," HumAngle, December 4, 2025.

³⁰⁶ House Appropriations Committee (HAC), "Appropriators, Lawmakers Investigate Religious Persecution of Nigerians with Joint Briefing," December 2, 2025, and "Appropriators Deliver Joint Report on Christian Persecution in Nigeria to White House," February 23, 2026.

interventions to “defend Christians,” and some have raised questions about the legal rationale for the December 2025 strikes, the cost of U.S. operations, U.S. efforts to prevent civilian harm, and how U.S. operations will affect levels of violence in the country.³⁰⁷ Others have expressed support for the operations in Nigeria, and some have called for further action to defend Christians.³⁰⁸

Direct U.S. military operations in Nigeria represent a departure from prior U.S. counterterrorism approaches in West Africa, which emphasized local military capacity-building, governance, conflict mitigation, and deradicalization. Unlike in Somalia, where the U.S. military has conducted airstrikes and occasional ground operations against terrorist groups for over two decades, the U.S. approach in West Africa had been indirect, with U.S. personnel supporting partner nations’ counterterrorism efforts through intelligence and security cooperation.

In national security policy documents, the Trump Administration has stated that its priority is to prevent terrorist groups from striking the United States and has asserted that it would pursue a “resources-sustainable approach to countering Islamic terrorists” focused on groups with the “capability and intent to strike the U.S. Homeland.”³⁰⁹ In April 2026, the Administration’s senior State Department official on Africa described the U.S. counterterrorism posture in Africa as “narrowly focused” on “protect[ing] the homeland from threats while safeguarding U.S. citizens and commercial interests abroad.”³¹⁰ The Administration’s May 2026 U.S. Counterterrorism Strategy identified two goals in Africa: preventing jihadist groups from building a base of operations that allows them to execute attacks against the United States and U.S. interests, and also “protecting Christians.”³¹¹ (The latter was not referenced in the Administration’s National Security Strategy or National Defense Strategy, nor in AFRICOM’s 2026 Posture Statement.) The U.S. intelligence community, in its 2026 Annual Threat Assessment, described Africa-based terrorist groups as posing a threat to U.S. interests in the region, but did not identify them as the most likely groups to support external plotting.³¹²

U.S. officials’ remarks about the May 2026 operations appear to indicate an evolving view within the Administration about the role IS elements in West Africa play in the IS global network: the President and U.S. military officials have stated that, with Mainuki’s death, “ISIS’s global operation is greatly diminished.”³¹³ Some experts contend that while his death may affect IS operations and coordination in West Africa in the short term, the diffuse nature of the IS network provides organizational flexibility and his role in the network will shift to someone else.³¹⁴

³⁰⁷ Rep. Gregory Meeks, “House Foreign Affairs Ranking Member Meeks, Jacobs Condemn Trump’s Threat of Aid Cuts and Military Action in Nigeria,” November 3, 2025; Rep. Sarah Jacobs, “Reps. Sarah Jacobs, Jason Crow demand Pentagon Briefing on Christmas Day Airstrikes on Nigeria,” March 9, 2026.

³⁰⁸ See e.g., Rep. Riley M. Moore (@RepRileyMoore), X posts, May 16, 2026, <https://x.com/RepRileyMoore/status/2055637588963201385>, and December 26, 2026, <https://x.com/RepRileyMoore/status/2004720136729825575>.

³⁰⁹ See DOD, *2026 National Defense Strategy*, January 2026; White House, *National Security Strategy*, November 2025; SASC, *FY2027 U.S. Central Command and U.S. Africa Command Posture Hearing*, May 14, 2026; and Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *2026 Annual Threat Assessment*, March 2026.

³¹⁰ Remarks by Senior Bureau Official Nick Checker in SFRC Africa Subcommittee, *The U.S. Approach to Counterterrorism in Africa*, hearing, April 21, 2026.

³¹¹ White House, *United States Counterterrorism Strategy*, May 2026.

³¹² Office of the Director of National Intelligence, *2026 Annual Threat Assessment*, March 2026.

³¹³ Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump), Truth Social post, May 15, 2026; “What to Know About Joint US-Nigeria Operation That Killed a Senior Militant Leader,” *Washington Post*, May 16, 2026.

³¹⁴ “Trump Says a Top ISIS Leader Was Killed in a U.S. Nigerian Mission,” *New York Times*.

Members of Congress may seek to examine the evolving role IS elements in West Africa play in the Islamic State network as they weigh budget and policy approaches to the region, and in the context of congressional deliberations on war powers. The Chairman's Mark of H.R. 8800, the FY2027 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), notes the House Armed Service Committee's concern with the deteriorating security environment and the increased operational tempo of militant Islamist groups in West Africa and the Sahel, and it directs the Secretary of Defense to brief the committee on U.S. counterterrorism requirements in West Africa.

Foreign assistance. Congress may weigh legislative and oversight tools to advance or modify the Administration's approach to foreign aid for Nigeria. Members may review past U.S. assistance for Nigeria and assess whether the current level of aid, in the aftermath of cuts and expiring awards, is sufficient or appropriately tailored to U.S. priorities. Some Members may seek further cuts in the context of competing budget priorities, while others may seek to increase assistance. As Congress considers the new bilateral health MOU in Nigeria, corruption and transparency in procurement processes may be areas of potential concern. Broader congressional debates about global health funding, including with respect to maternal and reproductive health care, may have implications for Nigeria. Members may seek to assess how the Administration is implementing Congress's FY2026 appropriations directives on Nigeria, and they may review how congressionally-imposed restrictions on the obligation of some FY2026 foreign assistance funds for Nigeria affect priorities for Congress and the Administration, including with respect to security assistance and bilateral health cooperation.

Trade and investment. Some Members may seek to explore tools available for promoting trade and U.S. investment in Nigeria, potentially including through foreign assistance (e.g., to counter corruption and/or improve the investment climate). Members may also seek to review the U.S. Development Finance Corporation's (DFC) commitments and plans for Nigeria, which has had one of DFC's largest portfolios in Africa, totaling roughly \$1 billion, under the Biden Administration.³¹⁵ Congress may consider U.S.-Nigeria trade relations as it debates the future of AGOA, which is currently set to expire at the end of 2026, and the Administration's tariffs.

Outlook. How Congress views and prioritizes U.S. interests in Nigeria shapes U.S. engagement with the country. Congress may influence bilateral relations through its appropriation and oversight of U.S. assistance, its consideration of military sales, and its engagement (e.g., through hearings, statements, travel, and correspondence) on issues related to Nigeria and U.S.-Nigeria policy. As Congress considers U.S. approaches on Nigeria, some Members may seek to assess U.S. priorities in the country against the backdrop of broader U.S. objectives in the region, including with respect to U.S. national security, foreign policy, and economic interests. Members may, for example, weigh policy options in the context of expanding terrorist activity in West Africa, U.S. strategic access in the region, and/or competition with U.S. rivals. Congress may examine tools for advancing U.S. influence and countering disinformation in Nigeria. Members may debate the relative merit and effectiveness of punitive actions versus measures that seek to improve bilateral relations or build Nigerian capacities to respond to issues of U.S. concern.

³¹⁵ U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, "DFC Announces More Than \$1.8 Billion in Investments and New Initiatives at UN General Assembly," September 27, 2024.

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