

CIFORB Country Profile – *Nigeria*

Demographics

- Nigeria has a population of 186,053,386 (July 2016 estimate), making it Africa's largest and the world's seventh largest country by population. Almost two thirds of its population (62 per cent) are under the age of 25 years, and 43 per cent are under the age of 15. Just under half the population lives in urban areas, including over 21 million in Lagos, Africa's largest city and one of the fastest-growing cities in the world.
- Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups, the most populous and politically influential being Hausa-Fulani 29%, Yoruba 21%, Igbo (Ibo) 18%, Ijaw 10%, Kanuri 4%, Ibibio 3.5%, Tiv 2.5%.
- It also has over 500 languages, with English being the official language.

Religious Affairs

- The majority of Nigerians are (mostly Sunni) Muslims or (mostly Protestant) Christians, with estimates varying about which religion is larger. There is a significant number of adherents of other religions, including indigenous animistic religions.
- It is difficult and perhaps not sensible to separate religious, ethnic and regional divides in Nigerian domestic politics. In simplified terms, the country can be broken down between the predominantly Hausa-Fulani and Kunari, and Muslim, northern states, the predominantly Igbo, and Christian, south-eastern states, the predominantly Yoruba, and religiously mixed, central and south-western states, and the predominantly Ogoni and Ijaw, and Christian, Niger Delta region. Or, even more simply, the 'Muslim north' and the 'Christian south' – finely balanced in terms of numbers, and thus regularly competing for 'a winner-take-all fight for presidential power between regions.'¹ Although Nigeria's main political parties are pan-national and secular in character, they have strong regional, ethnic and religious patterns of support.
- The vast majority of the population of northern Nigeria identifies as Muslim, and is primarily from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. In southwest Nigeria, which has large Christian and Muslim populations, the Yoruba is the largest ethnic group. Southeast Nigeria is largely Christian and is dominated by the Igbo ethnic group. The 'Middle Belt' in central Nigeria is home to numerous smaller ethnic groups that are predominantly Christian, with a significant Muslim population.
- Managing this diversity and developing a national identity has been, and continues to be, a challenge for Nigerians and the Nigerian government, especially between its 'Muslim north' and 'Christian south'. Fears of ethnic and religious domination are long-standing. Given that religious identity frequently falls along regional, ethnic, political, and socio-economic lines, it routinely provides flashpoints for violence. Moreover, religious practice is pervasive and churches and mosques operate independently of state control.

¹ United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), *Annual Report 2015* (2016), p. 101, <http://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

Political Affairs

- Nigeria is – following the resumption of democracy in 1999 after 30 years of military rule – a Federal Republic with a bicameral legislature elected to four-year terms, and a President elected by national popular vote for up to two four-year terms.
- The March 2015 presidential election was won with 54 per cent of the vote by northerner **Muhammadu Buhari**, a former military leader who was also Nigeria’s Head of State from 1983-1985 following a military coup, but who now describes himself as a ‘converted democrat’, for the economically centre-left and socially conservative **All Progressives Congress (APC)**, a party created in 2013 through a merger of opposition parties.
- The main opposition party, the **People’s Democratic Party (PDP)** is broadly economically centre-right and socially conservative, and held power from the resumption of democracy in 1999 until the 2015 elections.
- The APC’s 2015 manifesto included a commitment to ‘Uphold and enforce Chapter IV of the constitution and commit ourselves to the adherence and domestication of all UN & AU Charters and other regional global instruments on Human Rights’ and to ‘Introduce and strengthen legislations [sic] which protects and guarantees the right to free speech across Nigeria.’²

International Affairs (including membership of int. organisations, UPR/treaty committees coming up etc) treaty compliance

International Organisations:

- United Nations & its affiliated agencies
- Organisation of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)
- The World Trade Organisation (WTO)
- The International Monetary Fund (IMF)
- The Nonaligned Movement (NAM)
- Founding member of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)
- The Dominant partner in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)
- African Development Bank
- Lake Chad Basin Commission

FORB Record

Nigeria is a formally secular democracy, with constitutional prohibitions on a state religion and on religious discrimination, and provision for individuals’ freedom to choose, practice, propagate or change their religion.³ But according to the United States Commission on

² <http://www.apcpressreleases.com/the-apc-manifesto/4/>

³ Chapter IV of the Nigerian Constitution. Article 38, states: (1) Every person shall be entitled to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, including freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom (either alone or in community with others, and in public or in private) to manifest and propagate his religion or belief in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), while the Nigerian federal government does not engage in religious persecution, it often faces challenges in implementing effective strategies to prevent or stop terrorism or sectarian violence, and bring perpetrators to justice.⁴

The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria includes provisions protecting religious freedom and prohibiting discrimination based on religion, among other grounds. However, the implementation of some constitutional provisions in different regions results in religious freedom violations. Article 147 creates the legal category of ‘indigenes’, a term that the constitution does not define, but is used in Nigeria to mean persons whose ethnic group is considered native to a particular area (as opposed to so-called ‘settlers’, who have ethnic roots in another part of the country). State and local governments issue certifications granting indigene status, which bestow many benefits and privileges such as political positions, access to government employment, and lower school fees. In Nigeria’s Middle Belt, indigene and settler identities often fall along ethnic and religious lines, leading to ethno-religious violence over who controls local governments to determine indigene status and distribute the corresponding benefits. The constitution’s federalism provisions also create a decentralized rule-of-law system that could hinder effective and timely police responses to sectarian violence. In twelve Muslim-majority northern Nigerian states, federalism has allowed the adoption Shari’ah in the states’ criminal codes.

Current FORB challenges

- **Boko Haram insurgency:**

Boko Haram is an Islamist extremist group in Nigeria that aspires to establish Islamic law in Nigeria, destabilise the Nigerian government, and remove western influence from the country. It pledged allegiance to ISIL in March 2015. The Council on Foreign Relations’ Nigeria Security Tracker reports that from May 2011 through December 2015, Boko Haram killed more than 15,000 persons, and another 12,000 were killed in fighting between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces. According to United Nations estimates, more than 2.2 million Nigerians have been internally displaced due to violence perpetrated by Boko Haram, and 180,000 have sought refuge in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

Boko Haram has attacked Muslim and Christian religious leaders, places of worship and religious ceremonies, police, military, schools, ‘non-conforming’ Muslims, and Muslim critics. It has abducted thousands of people as slaves or wives, infamously including 270 schoolgirls from the town of Chibok, the subjects of the so-far unsuccessful ‘Bring back our girls’ social media campaign. However, in October 2016, twenty girls who were part of the 270 kidnapped by Boko Haram were freed following a deal made between Boko Haram and Switzerland and the International Red Cross; the twenty girls were returned home in December 2016.

(2) No person attending any place of education shall be required to receive religious instruction or to take part in or attend any religious ceremony or observance if such instruction ceremony or observance relates to a religion other than his own, or religion not approved by his parent or guardian.

(3) No religious community or denomination shall be prevented from providing religious instruction for pupils of that community or denomination in any place of education maintained wholly by that community or denomination.

(4) Nothing in this section shall entitle any person to form, take part in the activity or be a member of a secret society.

⁴ USCIRF report, p. 101,

<http://www.uscirtf.gov/sites/default/files/USCIRF%20Annual%20Report%202015%20%282%29.pdf>

In response to the insurgency, Nigerian government security forces have been implicated in violations of human rights and international humanitarian law, including the razing of homes in communities suspected of harbouring Boko Haram, incommunicado detention, extrajudicial killings, and enforced disappearances. As of February 2016, the Nigerian army claims to have defeated Boko Haram, and maintains that the fight against the insurgency has now entered a 'mop-up phase' that will facilitate the release of captives.⁵

Human rights groups and escaped Boko Haram abductees report that Christians under Boko Haram control were forced to convert or die and that Muslim abductees were required to attend Quranic schools to learn the group's extreme interpretation of Islam.

- **Sectarian violence:**

Long-standing tensions between ethnic and religious groups, particularly between Christians and Muslims, in Nigeria's 'Middle Belt' region have led to over 18,000 people killed since 1999, hundreds of thousands displaced and thousands of buildings destroyed, with little accountability for perpetrators. Federal and state government responses have been largely ineffective, with security officers accused of excessive use of force, or of failing to investigate crimes without financial inducements, further incentivising communities to take the law into their own hands and carry out retaliatory attacks.

In recent years, this violence has occurred primarily in rural areas. Recurrent violence between predominantly Christian farmers and predominantly Muslim nomadic herders in rural areas continued in 2015 and early 2016 and has resulted in hundreds of deaths and the destruction of a number of churches. While disputes over land and cattle grazing rights for Muslim herders occur in many Nigerian regions, Christian and Muslim communities in the religiously-diverse Middle Belt states view these conflicts in religious terms. According to the USCIRF 2015 Annual Report, once fighting starts, the communities view the conflict in terms of protecting their religious community from violence, and not necessarily in terms of land.

- **State-level legal issues (north):**

State-level criminal codes in twelve northern states incorporate interpretations of Shari'ah, with state-funded religious police providing enforcement in seven of these states. State governments in Bauchi, Zamfara, Niger, Kaduna, Jigawa, Gombe, and Kano funded and supported Hisbah, or religious police, to enforce such interpretations. These states have witnessed violence and discrimination targeting minority Muslim sects.

For example, on 5 January 2016, a Kano Shari'ah Court sentenced a Sufi Muslim cleric to death for derogatory remarks against the Prophet Mohammed. Five of his followers were likewise found guilty of blasphemy and sentenced to death in July, and an additional four were acquitted.

Meanwhile, according to the USCIRF 2015 Annual Report, the Nigerian military's alleged excessive use of force against a Shi'a Muslim group in Kaduna in December 2015 is reported to have worsened the government's relations with that minority community.

⁵ <https://www.thecable.ng/.Vs4gok8YHUA.twitter>

Christian leaders in the northern states have reported that state governments discriminate against Christians in denying applications to build or repair places of worship, access to education, and representation in government bodies and employment.

- **State-level legal issues (south)**

There are reports of discrimination against Muslims in southern states. For example, in 2014, hundreds of northern Muslims were arrested in the southern states on suspicion of being Boko Haram members. Moreover, Northern Muslims in the south-east are required to register with local governments. Meanwhile, a Lagos High Court upheld a ban on the *hijab* in all Ogun state schools.

Human Rights Record

In the latest Universal Periodic Review (2013), Nigeria received 219 recommendations of which it accepted 184, including sixteen on freedom of religion of belief (FoRB) of which it accepted fourteen. The two it did not accept both included references to protecting human rights irrespective of sexual orientation.

Commonwealth Relationship

Nigeria's membership in the Commonwealth was temporarily suspended between 1995 and 1999 in light of human rights abuses and the slow rate of democratisation by the Abacha government.