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Nigeria

Nigeria is considered a key country in Africa because of its size and political and economic role in the region, and the U.S. government considers its relationship with the country to be one of the most important on the continent. Nigeria is Africa's largest economy, largest oil producer, and most populous country, with more than 180 million people, roughly divided between Muslims and Christians. Its Muslim population is among the largest in the world, and has likely overtaken Egypt's as the largest on the continent. Lagos, its commercial center, is among the world's largest cities. Nigeria has long been a top troop contributor to U.N. peacekeeping operations.

Despite significant promise, Nigeria faces serious social, economic, and security challenges. Nigerian politics have been scarred by ethnic, geographic, and religious conflict. Corruption and misrule have undermined the state's authority and legitimacy. Years of social unrest, criminality, and corruption in the oil-rich Niger Delta have hindered oil production, delayed the southern region's development, and contributed to piracy in the Gulf of Guinea. Perceived neglect and economic marginalization have also fueled resentment in the predominately Muslim north. Communal grievances drive conflict in the country's Middle Belt.

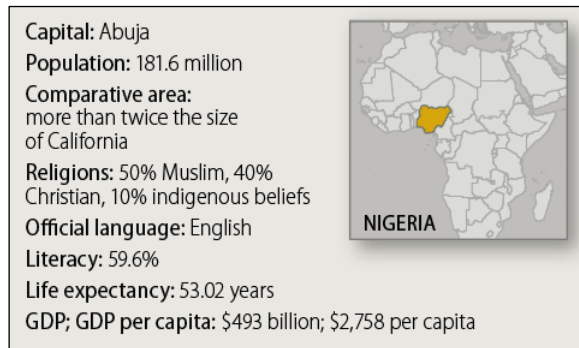
The Nigerian government has struggled to respond to the growing threat posed by Boko Haram, a violent Islamist extremist group based in the northeast. U.S. officials have expressed concern about Boko Haram's impact in Nigeria and neighboring countries; and its ties with other extremist groups, notably the self-proclaimed Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, to which Boko Haram pledged allegiance in 2015. The recruitment of Nigerians by other transnational terrorist groups has also been a concern. The State Department designated Boko Haram and a splinter faction, Ansaru, as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) in November 2013.

Political Context

Nigeria is a federal republic with a political structure similar to that of the United States. The country was ruled by the military for much of the four decades after independence before transitioning to civilian rule in 1999. Elections held in the subsequent decade were widely viewed as flawed, with each poll progressively worse than the last. Elections in 2011 were seen as more credible, although they were followed by violent protests in parts of the north that left more than 800 people dead and illustrated northern mistrust and dissatisfaction with the government.

Nigeria's 2015 elections were its most competitive contest to date and were viewed as a critical test for its leaders, its security forces, and its people. They have been widely hailed as historic, with the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and its president, Goodluck Jonathan, losing power to a new opposition coalition, led by former military

Figure 1. Nigeria Facts



Source: CRS Graphics. Map data from Department of State and Esri. Figures are 2015 estimates from CIA World Factbook and IMF, 2016.

ruler Muhammadu Buhari. Jonathan is the first incumbent Nigerian president to lose an election, which the White House described as demonstrating "the strength of Nigeria's commitment to democratic principles."

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

Security Concerns

Boko Haram has grown increasingly deadly in its attacks against state and civilian targets in Nigeria since 2010, drawing in part on a narrative of vengeance for state abuses to elicit recruits and sympathizers. More than 15,000 people are estimated to have been killed in Boko Haram violence, and more than two million Nigerians have been displaced. Boko Haram has called for an uprising against secular authority and a war against Christianity. Its attacks have not primarily targeted Christians, who are a minority in the north, where the group has been most active, but periodic attacks on Christian communities nevertheless fuel existing religious tensions in the country. Boko Haram commenced a territorial offensive in mid-2014 that Nigerian forces struggled to reverse until early 2015, when regional military forces, primarily from neighboring Chad, launched an offensive against the group. Mercenaries were also used in the campaign. The Nigerian army has since reclaimed most of the territory, although many areas remain insecure.

Multiple factors have undermined the Nigerian response to Boko Haram, notably security sector corruption and mismanagement. By many accounts, Nigerian troops have not been adequately resourced or equipped to counter the insurgency. Abuses by Nigerian forces have taken a toll on civilians and complicated U.S. efforts to pursue greater counterterrorism cooperation. Coordination has also been hampered at times by a lack of cooperation from Nigerian officials. In his campaign, Buhari was highly critical of Jonathan's management of the security response, and in July 2015 he replaced the country's security chiefs. The government has since pursued corruption charges against several high-level former security officials.

Boko Haram currently appears to pose a threat primarily to northern Nigeria and surrounding areas in neighboring countries. The group also poses a threat to international targets, including Western citizens, in the region. Boko Haram's leader has issued threats against the United States, but to date no U.S. citizens are known to have been kidnapped or killed by the group. Boko Haram's 2015 pledge of allegiance to the Islamic State has raised its profile and may provide recruitment and fundraising opportunities. The extent to which affiliation has facilitated operational ties between the groups remains unclear.

In the southern Niger Delta region, local grievances related to oil production have fueled conflict and criminality for over a decade. Government negotiations with local militants and an amnesty program have quieted the area, but the peace is fragile. Some militants remain involved in various local and transnational criminal activities, including piracy and drug and arms trafficking networks. These networks overlap with oil theft networks and contribute to the rising trend of piracy off the Nigerian coast and in the wider Gulf of Guinea, one of the world's most dangerous bodies of water. The U.N. Office on Drugs and Crime suggests that most piracy in the region can be traced back to the Niger Delta. Involvement in the theft and illegal trade of crude oil is not limited to Delta militants—politicians, security officers, and oil industry personnel are widely rumored to be implicated. Efforts to cut oil theft are also hampered by a lack of transparency in the oil industry.

Development Prospects and Challenges

Nigeria's economy is the largest in Africa and the 26th largest globally. The petroleum sector accounts for the majority of government revenues and export earnings. Low global oil prices have hamstrung the country's economic performance, compounding the challenges facing the Buhari Administration. Based on Nigeria's oil dependence, the government deficit has doubled to \$15 billion (3.3% of GDP). Nigeria has suffered a sharp decline in real GDP growth, from 6.2% in late 2014 to 2.8% in late 2015. The IMF forecasts 3.2% growth in 2016.

Nigeria continues to rank poorly on the U.N. Human Development Index. There is massive income inequality, and a majority of the population faces extreme poverty. Some economists view Nigeria's long-term growth as threatened by chronic underperformance, notably due to poor infrastructure and electricity shortages. Decades of economic mismanagement, instability, and corruption have

hindered investment in the country's education and social services systems and stymied industrial growth. Corruption is "massive, widespread, and pervasive," according to the State Department's annual human rights reports.

Divisions among ethnic groups, between regions, and between Christians and Muslims often stem from issues relating to access to land, socioeconomic development, and jobs, and are sometimes fueled by politicians. An estimated 16,000 Nigerians have died in local clashes in the last decade, and hundreds of thousands have been displaced.

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

While the Obama Administration considers its relationship with Nigeria to be a top priority on the continent, diplomatic engagement has been tempered in recent years by Nigerian perceptions of U.S. intrusion in domestic and regional affairs, and by U.S. concern with human rights, governance, and corruption issues. In 2010, the Obama and Jonathan Administrations established the U.S.-Nigeria Binational Commission, a strategic dialogue to address issues of mutual concern. President Obama hosted President Buhari at the White House in July 2015, and the Binational Commission held talks in Washington in late March 2016.

The United States is the largest source of FDI in Nigeria. Nigeria routinely ranked among the United States' largest sources of imported oil, with U.S. imports comprising over 40% of Nigeria's total crude oil exports until 2011. U.S. purchases of Nigerian oil have since plummeted as domestic U.S. crude supply has increased.

Congress oversees more than \$600 million per year in U.S. foreign aid to Nigeria—one of the largest U.S. bilateral aid packages in Africa. The Administration's FY2017 aid request includes more than \$606 million for Nigeria, much of it focused on health programs. Nigeria is a focus country under the President's health initiatives, Feed the Future, Power Africa, and the Security Governance Initiative.

U.S. security assistance to Nigeria has totaled more than \$15 million annually in recent years, much of it focused on enhancing counternarcotics, maritime security, and peacekeeping capacity. Counterterrorism assistance to Nigeria has been constrained by various factors, although Nigeria benefits from a \$40 million regional program to counter Boko Haram, among other initiatives, and U.S. Africa Command recently began training for a Nigerian infantry battalion. The deployment of U.S. military advisors to the northeast is reportedly under consideration. The State Department maintains a travel warning for U.S. citizens, noting the risk of armed attack in the northeast and the threat of kidnapping throughout the country, including in the Niger Delta. Official travel in the north is restricted.

See also CRS Report RL33964, *Nigeria: Current Issues and U.S. Policy*, CRS Report R43558, *Nigeria's Boko Haram: Frequently Asked Questions*, by Lauren Ploch Blanchard.

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