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Events of 2015

Nigeria is an exceedingly diverse country, with some 250 ethno-linguistic groups distributed across 36 federal states. At state level, original 'native' groups are given preferential treatment over other groups considered to be 'immigrants' or 'settlers', at times leading to tension, competition and inequalities. Broadly, Nigeria's south is wealthier and possesses more resources than the poorer and predominantly Muslim north. In the area between the two, the Plateau and Kaduna states of Nigeria's Middle Belt, 'native' ethnic groups are predominantly Christian while Muslim Hausa-Fulani groups – even those who have lived in the area for generations – are considered 'settlers'. Many 'natives' are sedentary farmers who have come into increasing conflict with Fulani Muslim nomadic pastoralists driven south by climate change-induced desertification in search of grazing for their herds. As a result, this region is particularly prone to inter-communal clashes, with 2015 being no exception: in April, for example, at least 23 people were killed by suspected armed Fulani herdsmen as a result of a protracted feud between herders and local farmers. As they are not considered 'native', despite many having been in the area for decades, Fulani receive inferior treatment under local legislation.

Before the 2015 elections, the presidency had been retained for 16 years by southerner Goodluck Jonathan's party, leading to some northern claims of exclusion. Initially scheduled for February, the polls were postponed until March due to security concerns. After what observers termed a generally peaceful and transparent contest, President Jonathan, from the country's southern Niger Delta region, conceded defeat to Muslim northerner Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress. This was the first time a Nigerian opposition leader had won an election.

One of Buhari's first major steps after being sworn in was to move the military command centre for the fight against Islamist insurgency Boko Haram from the capital Abuja to the group's birthplace in Maiduguri, Borno State. As over time the armed group has extended its operations into neighbouring Cameroon, Chad and Niger, in response Nigeria has intensified efforts with these countries, as well as Benin, to establish a previously agreed AU-backed Multinational Joint Task Force to fight Boko Haram across national borders. Nevertheless, Boko Haram fighters remained active throughout the year, beginning in January with a determined assault on Maiduguri and a massacre in Baga town, in the northern Borno State, that according to Human Rights Watch estimates may have killed as many as 2,000 civilians. Following a joint offensive by Nigeria and

Chad to regain control of border areas in the north under Boko Haram control, Boko Haram reportedly carried out reprisal attacks against members of the Shuwa Arab minority in the north, accusing them of supporting the Chadian military. It also declared allegiance to Islamic State (IS).

Despite losing territory, Boko Haram continued to launch regular attacks, particularly on soft civilian targets, including two days of violence in early July in Borno State that killed nearly 200 people in mosques and civilian homes, with similar attacks continuing until the year's end. A growing number of Boko Haram suicide bombings targeting areas such as markets, mosques and bus stations were carried out by women and children. The violence resulted in an estimated 800,000 newly displaced between June and the end of August, bringing the total of internally displaced in Nigeria to over 2.1 million. UNHCR recorded in 2015 an additional 170,000 Nigerian refugees in neighbouring countries.

Boko Haram has also had a devastating impact on the cultural heritage of minority communities, such as the Sukur people in Adamawa state and their Sukur Cultural Landscape, which was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999. The Sukur Cultural Landscape comprises the Palace of the Hidi (or chief), dry stone terraces and paved walkways dating back centuries. Most importantly, the complex was the setting for regular festivals and ceremonies – a living cultural and spiritual heritage. Boko Haram attacked the area at the end of 2014, killing men, and abducting women and children. They destroyed crops and then sabotaged buildings by burning the thatched roofs and damaging granary covers – thereby threatening any remaining food reserves of the community. Centuries-old patterns of land use had already been made vulnerable with the arrival of thousands of displaced to the area.

Another ongoing source of division within Nigeria, at times fuelling inter-ethnic conflict, is the inequitable allocation of oil revenue and the environmental damage associated with its extraction. Ogoni and other minorities based in the Niger Delta, in particular, have seen their lands devastated and their culture weakened by the impacts of soil and water contamination, making traditional farming and fishing impossible. Local communities have struggled for years to receive denied compensation, clean-up, their share of oil profits and a say in decision-making. A tentative sign of progress during the year, however, was the announcement by Buhari's government in August of the creation of a trust fund for affected communities to provide the estimated US\$1 billion required to decontaminate the area, though concerns remained about the willingness of Shell and partner companies to contribute their necessary share.

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