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Freedom in the World 2024 - Nigeria

PARTLY FREE

44

/ 100

Political Rights 20 / 40

Civil Liberties 24 / 60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

43 / 100 Partly Free

Global freedom statuses are calculated on a weighted scale. [See the methodology.](#)

Overview

While Nigeria has made significant improvements to the quality of its elections since the 1999 transition to democratic rule, the 2023 presidential and National Assembly elections, which saw Bola Tinubu elected president and the All Progressives Congress (APC) retain its legislative majority, were marred by irregularities. Corruption remains endemic in the key petroleum industry. Security challenges, including insurgencies, kidnappings, and communal and sectarian violence in the Middle Belt region, threaten the human rights of millions of Nigerians. Military and law enforcement agencies often engage in extrajudicial killings, torture, and other abuses. Civil liberties are undermined by religious and ethnic bias, while women and LGBT+ people face pervasive discrimination. The vibrant media landscape is impeded by criminal defamation laws, as well as the frequent harassment and arrests of journalists who cover politically sensitive topics.

Key Developments in 2023

- General elections held in February saw the APC retain their parliamentary majority and APC candidate Bola Tinubu elected to the presidency with approximately 37 percent of the vote. According to both domestic and international observers, February's elections were marred

by significant irregularities, including violence at a number of polling locations and technological and procedural errors that delayed the official pronouncement of the results.

- Tinubu's electoral victory was widely contested: more than 1,000 petitions were filed by opposition candidates and parties challenging the election outcome. An election tribunal upheld the results in September, ruling that the challengers had not been able to prove electoral fraud had occurred; in October, the Supreme Court upheld the September ruling, confirming Tinubu's election win.
- Protests erupted following the presidential, parliamentary, and gubernatorial polls in February and March and continued sporadically throughout the year; among other things, demonstrators protested against the outcome and conduct of the elections. Unlike in past years, demonstrations were generally allowed to proceed without interference or disruption by security forces.

Political Rights

A Electoral Process

A1 0-4 pts

Was the current head of government or other chief national authority elected through free and fair elections? **2 / 4**

The president can serve a maximum of two four-year terms and is elected by a qualified majority vote. The president must also win at least 25 percent of the votes cast in 24 states. Bola Tinubu of the APC was elected in February 2023 after winning approximately 37 percent of the vote. People's Democratic Party (PDP) candidate Atiku Abubakar won 29 percent of the vote, and Peter Obi of the Labour Party (LP) took 25 percent. Tinubu was inaugurated in May.

The 2023 presidential election featured significant irregularities, including violence at a number of polling locations; allegations of vote rigging and voter suppression; and technological and procedural errors that delayed the opening of the polls and the pronouncement of the results. Domestic and international observers expressed concern about the Independent National Electoral Commission's (INEC) management of the election, which was characterized by extremely low public trust in the INEC and a voter turnout of just 27 percent, a record low.

Abubakar and Obi challenged Tinubu's victory, both arguing that the INEC's failure to release the election results on time may have allowed for vote tampering. Altogether, more than 1,000 petitions were filed by opposition candidates and parties challenging the election outcome. An election tribunal upheld the results in September, ruling that the challengers had not been able to prove that the ruling APC had engaged in "electoral malpractice." Both

Abubakar and Obi appealed the decision. In October, Nigeria's Supreme Court upheld the September ruling, confirming Tinubu's election win.

A2 0-4 pts

Were the current national legislative representatives elected 2 / through free and fair elections? 4

Members of the bicameral National Assembly, consisting of the 109-seat Senate and the 360-seat House of Representatives, are elected for four-year terms.

Legislative elections were held concurrently with the February 2023 presidential election. The INEC published the official results of the legislative elections several days after the polls; among other problems, a number of races were deemed inconclusive, requiring the INEC to hold supplementary elections in April. According to the INEC, the APC won 176 seats in the House of Representatives, the PDP won 119, the LP won 35, the New Nigerian Peoples Party (NNPP) won 19, and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) won 5. Three other parties won two seats each. In the Senate, the APC won 59 seats, the PDP won 36, and the LP 8; the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the NNPP won 2 seats apiece, and two other parties each won 1 seat.

Gubernatorial elections for 28 states were held in March. The APC won 16 governorship elections, the PDP won 10, and the LP and NNPP won 1 each.

Observers reported numerous irregularities, including violence at polling stations, intimidation of voters and officials, and vote buying.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they 2 / implemented impartially by the relevant election management 4 bodies?

The 1999 constitution and the Electoral Act, 2022, provide Nigeria's legal electoral framework. Among other things, the Electoral Act, 2022, strengthens the financial independence of the INEC and allows for early political party primaries.

The INEC's management of the 2023 elections was heavily criticized by the opposition, civil society groups, and domestic and international election observers. European Union (EU) observers reported that the elections were poorly run and that the INEC failed to ensure a transparent and inclusive democratic process. Observers documented a number of operational and procedural errors by the INEC during the election period, including the late arrivals of INEC officials and election materials at numerous polling locations, delaying the vote; and the INEC's failure to display presidential result forms in real time on election day, despite its previous commitment to do so. EU observers further noted the INEC's "widespread disorganization" and "lack of adherence to prescribed procedures" during the collation process.

B Political Pluralism and Participation

B1 0-4 pts

Do the people have the right to organize in different political parties or other competitive political groupings of their choice, and is the system free of undue obstacles to the rise and fall of these competing parties or groupings? 3 / 4

Nigerians generally have the right to organize in different political parties. There were 91 registered parties and 73 presidential candidates in 2019, the largest number since the 1999 transition to democracy. The INEC removed 74 parties from the register in 2020, citing their inability to win the support of a sufficient number of voters and lack of representation nationwide. While 22 parties won an appeals court judgment that year, the Supreme Court ruled in favor of the INEC's original decision in 2021. At the end of 2022, 18 political parties were registered with the INEC; all 18 registered parties fielded candidates for the 2023 elections.

A 2018 constitutional amendment allowed independent candidates to compete in federal and state elections. Then president Muhammadu Buhari also signed a "Not Too Young to Run" bill that year, lowering the age of eligibility to run for political office from 40 to 35 years. However, a lack of internal party democracy and high fees make it difficult for prospective candidates to vie for major-party nominations.

B2 0-4 pts

Is there a realistic opportunity for the opposition to increase its support or gain power through elections? 3 / 4

Nigeria's multiparty system provides an opportunity for opposition parties to gain power through elections. Former president Buhari's 2015 election marked the first time in Nigerian history that a sitting president was peacefully replaced. Opposition parties can also gain influence when legislators cross the aisle; the APC lost its legislative majority when some of its legislators defected to the PDP during the 2015–19 term.

New political parties have successfully entered the National Assembly in recent years. However, the APC and PDP still hold most elected offices in Nigeria.

B3 0-4 pts

Are the people's political choices free from domination by forces that are external to the political sphere, or by political forces that employ extrapolitical means? 1 / 4

Citizens' political choices remain impaired or undermined by vote buying and intimidation, the influence of powerful domestic and international economic interests, and the local domination of either the military or armed groups in some regions. Wealthy political sponsors, or "godfathers," dispense patronage

and use their considerable influence to cultivate support for candidates who then use their offices to enrich their backers.

Voter inducements and intimidation have seriously affected elections in recent years, including in 2023. The presence and activities of armed groups also routinely disrupt elections. At some polling locations in Lagos State during the 2023 presidential elections, for example, armed groups launched violent attacks that both prevented people from casting their votes and invalidated the ballots that had already been cast.

B4 0-4 pts

Do various segments of the population (including ethnic, racial, religious, gender, LGBT+, and other relevant groups) have full political rights and electoral opportunities? 2 / 4

Nigeria's legal framework generally provides for equal participation in political life by the country's various cultural, religious, and ethnic groups. However, politicians and parties often rely on voters' ethnic loyalties, and the interests of a given group may be poorly addressed in areas where it forms a minority or when affiliated parties are not in power.

Women enjoy formal political equality, but restrictive societal norms limit their participation in practice. Following the 2023 elections, 3 women hold seats in the Senate, while 14 women won seats in the House of Representatives. According to the INEC, only 8 percent of candidates in the 2023 elections were women. Women are poorly represented in President Tinubu's 45-seat cabinet.

Same-sex relationships were criminalized and LGBT+ advocacy groups were banned in 2014. Openly LGBT+ people are deterred from running for office or working to advance their political interests.

C Functioning of Government

C1 0-4 pts

Do the freely elected head of government and national legislative representatives determine the policies of the government? 2 / 4

Elected officials generally make and implement policy in Nigeria, but are impaired by factors including corruption, partisan conflict, and poor control over areas where militant groups are active.

C2 0-4 pts

Are safeguards against official corruption strong and effective? 1 / 4

The government has attempted to reduce corruption in public and private institutions, but the practice remains pervasive, particularly in the oil and security sectors. A whistleblower policy introduced in 2016, which rewards Nigerians who provide information on government corruption, has led to the recovery of significant monies.

High-profile politicians, as well as senior law enforcement and anticorruption officials have faced corruption allegations in recent years. In June 2023, President Tinubu suspended the head of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), Abdulrasheed Bawa, based on allegations of abuse of power. Also in June, the head of Nigeria's central bank, Godwin Emefiele, was removed from office and arrested. Emefiele remained in state custody on various corruption-related charges until December despite several court rulings ordering his release. A special investigation into Emefiele's actions as head of the central bank uncovered numerous irregularities, including the existence of nearly 600 foreign bank accounts that authorities say Emefiele opened without authorization. The investigation remained ongoing at year's end.

Nigerian politicians have been locked in an effort to curb corruption in the petroleum sector since at least 2001, when legislators first considered an expansive Petroleum Industry Bill (PIB). The Petroleum Industry Act (PIA) was ultimately passed in 2021, providing a new legal, fiscal, and regulatory framework for the country's petroleum industry. Among other things, the PIA includes the "codification of transparency, good governance, and accountability in the administration" of Nigeria's petroleum sector. However, the implementation of the PIA remained slow in 2023.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency? 2 / 4

The 2011 Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) guarantees the right to access public records, but nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have criticized government agencies for routinely refusing to release information sought through the law. The law has also encountered resistance in some states. As of August 2023, several states had not yet established their own version of the FOIA.

Public officials are legally required to submit asset declarations upon taking office and when leaving. However, compliance with the law is reportedly poor.

Civil Liberties

D Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media? 2 / 4

Freedoms of speech, expression, and the press are constitutionally guaranteed. However, these rights are limited by sedition, criminal defamation, and so-called false-news laws. Sharia (Islamic law) statutes in 12 northern states impose severe penalties for alleged press offenses. Internet service providers sometimes block websites at the request of the Nigerian Communications Commission (NCC), particularly those advocating independence for the secessionist state of Biafra. The government has

accused journalists of undermining national security when reporting on operations against Boko Haram.

Officials restrict press freedom by publicly criticizing, harassing, and arresting journalists, especially when they cover corruption, human rights violations, separatist and communal violence, or other politically sensitive topics. The Media Foundation for West Africa (MFWA) reported that numerous press freedom violations, including attacks on journalists, took place during the 2023 election period. Nigeria's Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) documented 45 attacks against journalists in the first quarter of 2023.

Journalists are often subjected to arbitrary arrests on dubious grounds. In February 2023, journalist Haruna Mohammed Salisu was arrested in Bauchi State while interviewing a group of women protesting against the governor. Salisu was unlawfully detained for more than three days before being charged with "inciting disturbance of public peace"; he was released on bail in March. Salisu's case remained ongoing as of April.

In August 2023, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) warned that media organizations that failed to renew their broadcasting licenses by September would have their licenses revoked. Previously, in 2022, the NBC suspended the licenses of 53 radio stations that had failed to pay their licensing fees, drawing criticism from international media rights groups, who called the move a "signal of press freedom decline" in the country.

D2 0-4 pts

**Are individuals free to practice and express their religious faith or 1 /
nonbelief in public and private? 4**

Religious freedom is constitutionally protected, but the government has also embarked on crackdowns against religious groups that have questioned its authority. State and local governments have been known to endorse de facto official religions in their territory, placing limits on religious activity.

The Nigerian government has been locked in a long struggle against Boko Haram, a militant group that has itself targeted moderate Muslims and Christians along with their respective houses of worship. A number of violent attacks on Christian worshippers and nonreligious individuals by Islamist militants and other armed groups have been reported in recent years.

The government's conflict with the Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), a Shiite Muslim group that advocates for Islamic rule in Nigeria, escalated in 2019, when an Abuja court banned it and labeled it a terrorist organization. The IMN considers its leader, Sheikh Ibrahim el-Zakzaky, to be the ultimate source of authority in Nigeria, and does not recognize the government in Abuja. The government has responded violently to IMN activity in recent years.

Individuals who express nonbelief can face legal consequences. In 2020, Mubarak Bala, a humanist, was arrested in Kaduna State for social media comments criticizing Islam. Bala remained in pretrial detention until 2022, when he was sentenced to 24 years in prison on charges including blasphemy and contempt of religion.

D3 0-4 pts

Is there academic freedom, and is the educational system free from extensive political indoctrination? 3 / 4

The federal government generally respects academic freedom. However, some state governments mandate religious instruction in elementary and secondary curriculums and student admission and faculty hiring policies are subject to political interference.

Schoolchildren have been affected by Boko Haram's assault on secular education. Attacks on schools by Boko Haram and other armed groups have caused the closure or destruction of thousands of primary, secondary, and tertiary institutions.

The abduction of students by armed groups and criminals seeking ransom is a serious problem, especially in northern Nigeria. More than 30 students were kidnapped in Zamfara State in September 2023; local authorities reported that 13 students had been rescued by the end of the month.

Students have faced ill-treatment in unregulated Islamic schools, which have operated for decades. Some parents have patronized these schools for corrective services, as a robust juvenile-rehabilitation system is lacking in much of Nigeria.

D4 0-4 pts

Are individuals free to express their personal views on political or other sensitive topics without fear of surveillance or retribution? 3 / 4

Nigerians are generally free to engage in discussions on politics and other topics, though expression of critical views on political leaders or sensitive subjects like the military, religion, and ethnicity occasionally leads to arrests or violent reprisals.

E Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly? 2 / 4

The right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed. However, federal and state governments frequently ban public events perceived as threats to national security, including those that could incite political, ethnic, or religious tension. Rights groups have criticized federal and state governments for prohibiting or dispersing protests that are critical of authorities or

associated with controversial groups, including the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

A number of protests in recent years have been met with violence by security forces, who often use force to break up demonstrations. In 2022, police used tear gas to disperse a peaceful demonstration commemorating the second anniversary of the 2020 #EndSARS protests against police brutality; at least 12 people were killed during the 2020 protests when security forces fired into a crowd.

Conditions improved considerably in 2023. Demonstrations held during the year—including large antigovernment protests—were generally allowed to proceed without interference or disruption by security forces. Protests erupted following the presidential, parliamentary, and gubernatorial polls in February and March; among other things, demonstrators protested against the outcome and conduct of the elections, which were marred by electoral violence and administrative challenges. Following the initial demonstrations in February and March, election-related protests continued periodically throughout the year. Other demonstrations included protests against the rising cost of living and President Tinubu's decision to end fuel subsidies.

Score Change: The score improved from 1 to 2 because authorities generally tolerated a wave of large postelection protests.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights– and governance-related work? **2 / 4**

Nigeria has a broad and vibrant civil society. However, members of some organizations face intimidation and physical harm for speaking out against Boko Haram, or encounter obstacles when investigating alleged human rights abuses committed by the military against Boko Haram suspects. Groups operating in the restive Niger Delta region face intimidation.

Civil society played a significant role during the 2023 electoral period, including by providing civic and voter education. In February, the governor of Adamawa State suspended the activities of local and international NGOs in the state until after the elections, accusing NGOs of interfering in politics under the guise of providing humanitarian aid.

Aid workers operating in the northeast are impeded by restrictions imposed by civilian and military officials as well as by the activities of armed groups. In separate attacks in April 2023, gunmen abducted five aid workers in Benue State and militants affiliated with the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), a Boko Haram splinter group, abducted three aid workers in Borno State.

E3 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for trade unions and similar professional or labor organizations? 3 / 4

Workers are constitutionally allowed to form and join trade unions, engage in collective bargaining, and conduct strikes. Nevertheless, the government forbids strike action in some essential services, including public transportation and security.

In September 2023, labor unions organized a series of a nationwide strikes protesting the government's May decision to remove fuel subsidies. The country's main labor unions also called a nationwide strike in November after Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) president Joe Ajaero was allegedly assaulted by security agents; police denied beating Ajaero.

F Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary? 2 / 4

Judicial independence is constitutionally and legally enshrined. The judiciary has achieved some degree of independence and professionalism, but political interference, corruption, equipment, and training remain key problems. Funding is also a problem for the judiciary. In 2020, then president Buhari signed an executive order ostensibly giving state-level judiciaries and legislatures financial autonomy. Nigeria's 36 state governors sued the federal government that September, alleging that it sought to avoid its financial responsibilities through the order. The Supreme Court dismissed the suit in 2022, affirming that the government is not responsible for funding state courts.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters? 1 / 4

There have been numerous allegations of extortion and bribe taking within the police force. Federal and state authorities have been criticized for disregarding due process, with prolonged pretrial detention of suspects even after courts ordered their release on bail.

Accountability for the use of force during the 2020 #EndSARS protests has been lacking. In October 2023, Amnesty International reported that at least 15 protesters arrested during the #EndSARS protests three years earlier remained in arbitrary detention, most without trial.

Nigerians in the southeast risked arbitrary arrest during the government's campaign against the IPOB's armed wing, which began in 2021.

In 2021, IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in Kenya and returned to Nigeria, facing charges including treason. A Nigerian court dropped all charges against Kanu in 2022, ruling against the government to find that his arrest and extradition had been illegal. Though the court ordered Kanu's "immediate release," the government refused to comply. The government

appealed the decision, and an appellate court placed a stay on the ruling's implementation. In December 2023, Nigeria's Supreme Court overturned the 2022 ruling that had dropped all charges against Kanu. Kanu remained in prison at year's end.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and 0 / freedom from war and insurgencies? 4

The military has been repeatedly criticized by local and international human rights groups for extrajudicial killings, torture, and other abuses, including during counterinsurgency efforts in the northeast and operations against separatist movements in the southeast. Police have also been accused of using excessive force.

A Reuters investigation published in 2022 reported that, according to dozens of military and civilian eyewitnesses, the Nigerian military has "slaughtered" at least 60 children perceived to be "children of Boko Haram" since 2009. Unconfirmed witness reports claim the number of child deaths is significantly higher. The Nigerian military has denied the allegations.

Boko Haram and ISWAP remained active during 2023. In October, Boko Haram militants killed at least 37 people in attacks in Yobe State. Fighting between militant factions has also led to increased violence in northern Nigeria in recent years; between February and March 2023, ISWAP led attacks that killed at least 200 rival militants, women, and children in Borno.

A rolling conflict between farmers and the Fulani, a seminomadic Muslim ethnic group, continued to destabilize northern Nigeria in 2023. The Fulani have abandoned degraded grasslands in the north, coming into increased conflict with farmers as they travel south to find new grazing lands. In May 2023, 100 people were reportedly killed in a clash between farmers and herders in north-central Nigeria.

Kidnapping and other forms of criminality are acute concerns. According to the Council on Foreign Relations's (CFR's) Nigeria Security Tracker (NST), more than 3,300 people were killed in the first six months of 2023. Hundreds of people were kidnapped during the year; in one case in November, at least 150 people were kidnapped for ransom by armed gunmen in Zamfara State.

F4 0-4 pts

Do laws, policies, and practices guarantee equal treatment of 1 / various segments of the population? 4

Despite constitutional safeguards against ethnic discrimination, many ethnic minorities experience bias by state governments and other societal groups in areas including employment, education, and housing.

Women are subject to widespread societal discrimination regarding matters such as education and employment.

LGBT+ Nigerians face widespread official and societal discrimination. Nigerians convicted of engaging in same-sex relationships can be imprisoned for as long as 14 years, while 12 northern states maintain the death penalty for same-sex relations. LGBT+ people are also subject to assault by police officers during arrests, extortion attempts, and discrimination when accessing public and private services. In August 2023, police raided an alleged gay wedding and arrested several dozen people in Delta State; officials later said that 67 individuals would be prosecuted for conducting or attending a same-sex wedding ceremony. More than 75 people were arrested under similar circumstances in Gombe State in October.

G Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy freedom of movement, including the ability to 1 /
change their place of residence, employment, or education? 4**

While the freedom of movement is legally guaranteed, the presence of armed groups and criminal organizations in several parts of the country sometimes prevents people from exercising this right. Security officials frequently impose dusk-to-dawn curfews and other movement restrictions in areas affected by communal violence or militant activities.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) reported that approximately 2.3 million people in northeast Nigeria were internally displaced as of December 2023.

G2 0-4 pts

**Are individuals able to exercise the right to own property and 1 /
establish private businesses without undue interference from state 4
or nonstate actors?**

Nigeria's poorly regulated property rights system hinders citizens and private businesses from engaging in the efficient and legal purchase or sale of property, including land. Bribery is a common practice when starting a business and registering property. Women belonging to certain ethnic groups are often denied equal rights to inherit property due to customary laws and practices.

The property rights of Fulani and of farmers are affected by violence as Fulani travel south to find new grazing lands. Herding groups' grazing lands have been used for cultivation, while Fulani herders have been observed expropriating farmers' land and crops.

G3 0-4 pts

**Do individuals enjoy personal social freedoms, including choice of 1 /
marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic 4
violence, and control over appearance?**

Despite the existence of strict laws against rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), and child marriage, these offenses remain widespread, with low rates of reporting and prosecution. Women and girls in camps for displaced persons have reported sexual abuse by members of the military and other authorities. Boko Haram's attacks on women's rights have been particularly egregious, with victims often subjected to forced marriage and rape, among other acts.

Abortion is illegal unless the life of the mother is in danger. As a result, many women seek out dangerous illegal abortions, finding themselves at risk of medical complications. Women who face such complications often do not receive further medical treatment.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from 1 / economic exploitation? 4

Nigerian organized crime groups are heavily involved in human trafficking. Boko Haram has subjected children to forced labor and sex slavery. Both Boko Haram and a civilian vigilante group that opposes the militants have forcibly recruited child soldiers, according to the US State Department.

Implementation of the 2003 Child Rights Act, which protects children from sexual exploitation and other abuses, remains uneven.

The US State Department's 2023 *Trafficking in Persons Report* noted that Nigeria "does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking." The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons (NAPTIP) continues to rescue trafficking survivors and prosecute some suspected traffickers, but its funding is reportedly inadequate. Survivors often find their freedom of movement withheld by NAPTIP in poorly managed shelters and experience discrimination when seeking access to public services after their release.

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