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The State of the World's Human Rights; Nigeria 2025

Journalists and other people critical of the authorities were arrested, charged and arbitrarily detained. Security and law enforcement agents used excessive force to disperse peaceful protesters, killing several people and arbitrarily arresting others. Authorities failed to protect girls from abductions and people from killings by gunmen. Military air strikes unlawfully targeted civilians. Armed group Boko Haram continued to kill civilians. Acute food and nutrition insecurity remained high throughout the country. Forced evictions occurred in several states. The UK High Court confirmed the Court of Appeal's ruling permitting communities in Rivers State to hold Shell accountable for environmental damage.

Background

On 18 March, a six-month state of emergency was declared in Rivers State. During the state of emergency, democratically elected state authorities were suspended, and authorities increased militarization, resulting in increased marginalization of political minorities. The armed conflict between Boko Haram and the military persisted. The authorities' failure to protect lives and property from daily attacks by armed groups and bandits cost thousands of lives and created a potential humanitarian crisis across many northern states.

In May, at least 110 people died when floods submerged and washed away more than 50 homes and their occupants in the town of Mokwa, Niger state.

Freedom of expression

The authorities continued to arrest and detain journalists and others expressing dissent. On 27 January, Omoyele Sowore, publisher of the online news site Sahara Reporters, was arrested and detained by police for his posts on X against the Inspector General of Police, calling him "illegal IGP Kayode Egbetokun". He was charged under the Cybercrimes Act 2024 and released on bail.

On 2 March, 19-year-old social media critic Haruna Mohammed, known as Abale Borno, was arrested and detained after a viral social media post on the ramshackle state of public schools in Borno state. The police charged him with "defaming and degrading the personality of the governor". The magistrate granted him bail, and although the case had not been formally withdrawn by year's end, the police were no longer pursuing it.

On 7 March, peaceful protests took place in the city of Port Harcourt in response to the increasing clampdown on the right to freedom of expression through the use of the Cybercrimes Act. During the protests, the police assaulted journalists Charles Opurum of Channels Television, Allwell Ene of Naija FM, Soibelemari Oruwari of Nigeria-Info, Ikezam Godswill of AIT and Femi Ogunkhilede of Super FM. The police fired tear gas at peaceful protesters, confiscated cameras and ordered journalists at gunpoint to delete video footage recording their actions.

On 16 March, Ushie Uguamaye, known as Raye, a national service corps member, received threats and intimidation from National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) officials for posting a TikTok video lamenting the escalating economic hardship across the country. Following her refusal to delete the video, upon completion of her service in August the NYSC withheld her discharge certificate, extending her service by two months as punishment.

On 25 March, police arrested Buhari Abba, an online editor with Kano Times, and Ismail Auwal, a freelance journalist, over a report deemed critical of the Kano State Commissioner of Information Ibrahim Waiya. They were detained for several hours before being released, and there was no record of an ongoing trial.

In April, the National Broadcasting Commission banned singer Eedris Abdulkareem's song "Tell your papa" for being critical of the government, categorizing the song as "not to be broadcast".¹

On 23 September, lawyer and activist Chinedu Agu was remanded in prison after arraignment on criminal defamation charges over his opinion articles criticizing Imo state governor Hope Uzodimma. He was released after 28 days in prison, pending trial. At year's end, the court had not set a trial date.

Freedom of peaceful assembly

On 27 March, the military fired live ammunition on supporters of the Islamic Movement in Nigeria during a protest in the capital, Abuja, marking the end of Ramadan fasting. They killed at least five people, with several others sustaining life-threatening injuries.² Thirteen people, including pro-democracy campaigner Omoyele Sowore and lawyer Aloy Ejimakor, were arrested on 20 October in Abuja for participating in a peaceful protest calling for the release of Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra. They were arraigned on multiple charges, including criminal conspiracy, disobedience of a lawful order, inciting public disturbance, and causing a breach of the peace. On 24 October, they were granted bail and their trial remained ongoing at year's end.

Right to life

The authorities failed to fulfil their obligations to prevent attacks on individuals and communities, to safeguard their rights to life and physical integrity, and to ensure justice by investigating and prosecuting those responsible for the violence.³

On 2 February, herders attacked Amagu, a village in Ishielu local government area (LGA), Ebonyi state, killing at least 15 people and destroying several properties. On 27 March, at least 16 people — hunters travelling from Rivers State to the city of Kano to celebrate Eid with their families — had their vehicle blocked and were dragged one by one, beaten and then set ablaze by a local vigilante and armed youths in the city of Uromi, Edo state.

Between 27 March and 2 April, at least 60 people were killed by gunmen in a coordinated attack across several communities — Mangor Tamiso, Daffo, Manguna, Hurti and Tadaï — in Bokkos LGA, Plateau state. On 4 March, gunmen abducted and killed Sylvester Okechukwu, a priest serving in Tachiri village in Kaura LGA, Kaduna state. On 13 April, at least 51 people were killed when gunmen invaded Zikke village of Bassa LGA, Plateau state.⁴ On 24 April, gunmen invaded Gobirawa Chali village of Dan Gulbi district Maru LGA, Zamfara state and killed over 20 people.

On 8 May, gunmen killed at least 30 people and burnt over 20 commuter vehicles and trucks along the Okigwe-Owerri road in Imo state. Between 25 May and 1 June, at least 85 people were killed by gunmen in Tse Antswam community, near Naka in Gwer West LGA, and in Edikwu Ankpali village in Apa LGA, Benue state. On 14 June, gunmen raided the town of Yelewata, Benue state, killing more than 100 people and forcing at least 3,941 more to flee their homes.⁵ On 20 June, at least 12 travellers from Basawa village in Zaria LGA, Kaduna state were killed, and 11 people were injured by a mob in Mangu LGA, Plateau state.

On 15 July, gunmen attacked Bindi-Jebbu of Tahoss community in Riyom LGA, Plateau state, killing at least 27 people; families were locked up in their rooms and slaughtered one by one. On 19 August, gunmen attacked a mosque and nearby homes and killed at least 50 people and abducted 60 others at Unguwan Mantau community in Malumfashi LGA, Katsina state.

On 18 November, gunmen attacked worshippers at Christ Apostolic Church Oke-Isegun in the town of Eruku, Kwara state, killing three people and abducting 38 others. They were freed on 23 November.

Unlawful attacks and killings

The military continued to perpetrate indiscriminate or disproportionate attacks against civilians. On 11 January, a military air strike killed at least 20 people at Tungar Kara village of Maradun LGA, Zamfara state. On 15 February, a military air strike killed at least six civilians at Zakka village, and another six civilians in Yauni community in the Safana LGA, Katsina state. On 31 May, military air strikes killed 20 people and wounded dozens in Maraya and Wabi villages in Maru LGA, Zamfara state, including local vigilantes who gathered to confront bandits that attacked their villages.

Violations of international humanitarian law

According to the UN, Boko Haram continued to perpetrate indiscriminate attacks and to target civilians. On 15 May, Boko Haram fighters killed 23 farmers and fishermen in Malam

Karanti village, Borno state. In September, Boko Haram fighters killed at least 60 people in an overnight attack on the village of Darul Jamal, Borno state, destroying 20 houses and burning 10 buses.

Economic, social and cultural rights

The escalating price of food drove millions of people deeper into poverty, and families were increasingly unable to afford the costs of healthcare and education. The new Tax Act 2025, which introduced a 5% fossil fuel products tax on petrol and diesel, effective from January 2026, was expected to further increase poverty. According to a report by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization and Nigeria's Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, 30.6 million people were estimated to be facing acute food and nutrition insecurity.

The cuts to USAID funding affected health programmes, leaving thousands of people living with HIV to face uncertain futures.

Attacks by gunmen in the central state of Benue caused the internal displacement of 500,000 people. Many people remained living in squalid camps with poor sanitation, food and healthcare and lack of access to sufficient water.

Forced evictions

On 3 February, at least four people were killed during a violent forced eviction carried out by Kano state government in Rimin Auzinawa, a suburb in Ungogo LGA. The eviction occurred without genuine consultation, adequate prior notice, provision of compensation or alternative housing for affected residents.

On 7 March, the Lagos state government conducted a violent forced eviction of the Ilaje-Otumara community of Lagos, rendering over 10,000 people homeless.⁶ On 25 October, the Lagos state government carried out violent forced evictions at Oworonshoki community – demolishing over 70 residential buildings – despite a State High Court order against the demolition. Some homes were torn apart by bulldozers while families were still inside, as security operatives fired tear gas canisters, which scattered hundreds of families.

Right to a healthy environment

Implementation failures continued to undermine Nigeria's climate policies in the non-energy sector. The government failed to halt funding for carbon-intensive projects. The nation's energy supply remained heavily reliant on fossil fuels, compelling many people to depend on petrol-powered generators for electricity.

On 20 June the UK High Court ruled that Shell could be held responsible for its oil spills in the Niger Delta.⁷ A trial was scheduled to take place in 2027.

Women's and girls' rights

The authorities failed to take effective measures to prevent attacks on women and girls across several communities. On 27 February, gunmen abducted four female students from their hostel at J.S. Tarka University in the city of Makurdi, Benue state. On 15 April, Hisbah operatives (government-sanctioned religious police) assaulted Hauwa'u Lawal Suleiman and her sisters in Katsina state over so-called "immoral gatherings". The authorities failed to investigate allegations of sexual harassment raised by Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan against the president of the Senate, Godswill Akpabio.

On 17 November, gunmen abducted 25 schoolgirls from their school in the town of Maga, Kebbi state, and killed the school's vice principal. The students were released on 25 November.

On 21 November, gunmen abducted 303 schoolgirls and 12 staff from a school in Papiri community, Agwara LGA, Niger state. Fifty girls later escaped.

