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FREEDOM IN THE WORLD 2025

Nigeria

PARTLY FREE

44
/100

<u>Political Rights</u>	20 /40
<u>Civil Liberties</u>	24 /60

LAST YEAR'S SCORE & STATUS

44 /100 **Partly Free**

A country or territory's Freedom in the World status depends on its aggregate Political Rights score, on a scale of 0–40, and its aggregate Civil Liberties score, on a scale of 0–60. See the methodology.



Overview

While Nigeria has made significant improvements to the quality of its elections since the 1999 transition to civilian rule, balloting has continued to be marred by irregularities. Corruption is endemic in the petroleum industry, and security challenges—including insurgencies, kidnappings, and communal and sectarian violence in the Middle Belt region—threaten the basic 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 arrest of journalists who cover politically sensitive topics.

Key Developments in 2024

- In July, the Supreme Court affirmed the autonomy of Nigeria's 774 local government councils by upholding local governments' authority to manage budgets, among other things, without state government interference. In the wake of the ruling, the Senate introduced a bill that would create a National Independent Local Government Electoral Commission to oversee local elections and combat meddling by state-level political leaders; the bill was still pending at year's end, and 28 local elections were held during the year.
- Gubernatorial elections were held in Edo State and Ondo State in September and November, respectively. Candidates from the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party won both contests. The election in Edo State featured a number of irregularities, including allegations of vote buying and violence that disrupted the counting process.
- Hundreds of protesters were arrested or detained, and more than 20 people were killed, during nationwide demonstrations organized under the social media hashtag #EndBadGovernance in August and September. The protests called for lower taxes, reduced salaries for politicians, and judicial reform.

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 of that year.

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 performance of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) in managing the election, which was characterized by extremely low public trust and a record-low voter turnout of just 27 percent.

Gubernatorial elections for 28 states were held in March 2023. The APC won 18 governorships, the PDP won 10, and the LP and New Nigeria People's Party (NNPP) won 1 each. Gubernatorial elections for Edo State and Ondo State, held in September and November 2024, drew low voter turnout. According to a Nigerian election observation group, YIAGA Africa, the process in Edo State was marred by several irregularities, including allegations of vote buying and violence that disrupted the counting process.

A2 0-4 pts

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

2/4

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 supplementary elections in April. According to the commission, the APC won 176 seats in the House of Representatives, the PDP won 119, the LP won 35, the NNPP won 19, and the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) won 5. Three other parties won 2 seats each. In the Senate, the APC won 59 seats, the PDP won 36, and the LP took 8; the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the NNPP won 2 seats each, and two other parties each won 1 seat. In February 2024, the APC won two Senate by-elections in Yobe State and Ebonyi State, thereby retaining its majority.

Observers reported numerous irregularities, including violence at polling stations, intimidation of voters and officials, and vote buying, in legislative elections held in 2023 and 2024.

A3 0-4 pts

Are the electoral laws and framework fair, and are they implemented impartially by the relevant election management bodies?	2 / 4
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The 1999 constitution and the Electoral Act, 2022, provide Nigeria's legal framework for elections. Among other things, the Electoral Act strengthened the financial independence of the INEC and allowed for early political party primaries. A law enacted in 2018 lowered the age of eligibility to run for political office from 40 to 35 years.

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. They 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. At the end of 2022, 18 political parties were registered with the INEC, and all of them fielded candidates for the 2023 general elections.

A 2018 constitutional amendment allowed independent candidates to compete in federal and state elections. However, a lack of internal party democracy and high fees make it difficult for prospective candidates to vie for major-party nominations or mount strong independent campaigns.

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 Muhammadu Buhari's 2015 election marked the first time in Nigerian history that a sitting president was peacefully replaced. In the September 2024 gubernatorial election in Edo State, the opposition APC defeated the incumbent PDP, although the PDP rejected the outcome based on allegations of fraud. Opposition parties can also gain influence when legislators cross the aisle; during the 2015–19 term, the APC lost its legislative majority when some of its legislators defected to the PDP.

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.

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 parliamentary elections and 2024 by-elections, four women held seats in the Senate, while 14 women held 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.

In light of obstacles including a 2014 law that criminalized same-sex relationships and advocacy for LGBT+ people's rights, 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. Although the number of bills introduced by National Assembly members has increased since the 2023 elections, observers continue to assess that the legislature largely follows the lead of the executive and does not serve as a strong check on executive authority.

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 problem 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 assets. The country's main anticorruption body, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), secured more than 3,000 convictions and recovered millions of dollars between May 2023 and May 2024. A July 2024 report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime indicated that bribery was becoming less acceptable.

States and politicians under EFCC investigation have filed legal challenges against the body. In October 2024, 15 states filed a case with the Supreme Court that challenged the constitutionality of the law establishing the EFCC; the court dismissed the lawsuit in November. High-profile prosecutions that were ongoing during 2024 included those against former Kogi State Governor Yahaya Bello and former Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele.

C3 0-4 pts

Does the government operate with openness and transparency?	2/4
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The 2011 Freedom of Information Act guarantees the right to access public records, but nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and journalists have criticized government agencies for routinely refusing to release information as requested under the law. The law has also encountered resistance in some states, while others, including Kaduna, are making efforts to incorporate it into state legislation. In August and September 2024, the #EndBadGovernance demonstrations focused on problems related to a lack of government transparency and accountability.

Public officials are legally required to submit asset declarations upon taking office and when leaving. However, compliance with the law is reportedly poor. In May 2024, the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project, an NGO, demanded that the president, vice president, and cabinet ministers publish their asset declarations.

Civil Liberties

D. Freedom of Expression and Belief

D1 0-4 pts

Are there free and independent media?	2/4
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Freedoms of speech, expression, and the press are constitutionally guaranteed. However, these rights are limited by laws on sedition, criminal defamation, and false news. Sharia (Islamic law) statutes in 12 northern states impose severe penalties for certain alleged press offenses. Internet service providers sometimes block websites at the request of the Nigerian Communications Commission, particularly sites that advocate independence for the region known to separatists

as Biafra. The government has accused journalists of undermining national security when reporting on operations against the Islamist militant group Boko Haram.

Officials restrict press freedom in practice 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 reported that physical attacks and death threats against journalists continued during 2024. According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, more than 50 journalists were assaulted or harassed by security forces while covering the nationwide antigovernment protests that began in August. In one of the year's more prominent cases, newspaper editor Segun Olatunji was abducted by the military in March and released after spending two weeks in detention.

In the past, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has imposed fines and revoked or suspended the licenses of radio stations for content it considers to be in violation of the country's media regulations. In January 2024, however, the Federal High Court struck down provisions of the Nigerian Broadcasting Code that allowed the NBC to fine broadcasters.

D2 0-4 pts

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

1/4

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 other religious activity.

A number of violent attacks on Christian worshippers and nonreligious individuals by Islamist militants and other armed groups have been reported in recent years. Three people were killed and several others were abducted by militants in a terrorist attack during a church service in Kaduna State in September 2024.

The government has responded violently to activity by the Islamic Movement of Nigeria, a Shiite Muslim group that advocates for Islamic rule; the group was

officially banned and labeled a terrorist organization in 2019.

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. In September 2024, the Academic Staff Union of Nigerian Universities called on the government to protect academic freedom after more than 100 union members were dismissed from several universities over their participation in national strikes in 2021.

Schoolchildren have been affected by Boko Haram's assault on secular education. Attacks on schools and kidnappings 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 the north. In March 2024, armed men attacked two schools in northwestern Nigeria, abducting nearly 300 students.

Students have faced ill-treatment in unregulated Islamic schools, which have operated for decades. Some parents have patronized these schools for corrective services in the absence of robust juvenile-rehabilitation systems.

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. The Cybercrimes Act, 2015, which was amended in February 2024 to slightly narrow its broad definition of criminal "cyberstalking," has been used by the

government to restrict online publications and to arrest and imprison activists and journalists for their online activity.

E. Associational and Organizational Rights

E1 0-4 pts

Is there freedom of assembly?	2/4
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The right to peaceful assembly is constitutionally guaranteed. However, federal and state governments frequently ban public events that they deem to be 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 separatist Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB).

A number of protests in recent years have been met with violence by security forces. Hundreds of protesters were arrested or detained during the nationwide #EndBadGovernance demonstrations in August and September 2024, and more than 20 people were killed. Dozens of protesters, including minors, were charged with treason, which can draw the death penalty. Many of those charges were dropped in November.

E2 0-4 pts

Is there freedom for nongovernmental organizations, particularly those that are engaged in human rights- and governance-related work?	2/4
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Nigeria has a broad and vibrant civil society. There are no onerous restrictions on the establishment of NGOs, which are generally able to engage in work on human rights and governance issues. Civil society organizations have played significant roles in elections and protests, including the demonstrations that occurred in August and September 2024. 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. Groups working in the restive Niger Delta region also face intimidation.

Humanitarian 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. More than 20 aid workers were reportedly attacked, kidnapped, or assaulted between January and August 2024.

E3 0-4 pts

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

Labor unions were active in the #EndBadGovernance protests in August and September 2024. In August, security forces raided the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) office in Abuja, claiming that the group had materials intended to incite and organize protests. NLC President Joe Ajaero was arrested in September after he criticized the government for raising fuel prices and threatened to organize a strike.

F. Rule of Law

F1 0-4 pts

Is there an independent judiciary?	2/4
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Judicial independence is constitutionally and legally enshrined. The judiciary has achieved some degree of independence and professionalism in practice, but political interference, corruption, and lack of equipment and training remain key problems. According to a July 2024 report from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, judges received the largest monetary bribes of all public officials

in 2023. The judicial appointment process lacks transparency, creating opportunities for corruption. In October 2024, President Tinubu signed legislation to increase judicial officers' salaries by 300 percent in an effort to combat bribery, among other goals.

F2 0-4 pts

Does due process prevail in civil and criminal matters?	1/4
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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 sometimes continuing even after courts have ordered their release on bail.

In 2021, IPOB leader Nnamdi Kanu was arrested in Kenya and returned to Nigeria, facing charges including treason. The government refused to release him after a Nigerian court ruled in 2022 that his arrest and extradition had been illegal. The Supreme Court ultimately overturned the 2022 ruling in 2023, and Kanu remained in detention awaiting trial as of 2024.

F3 0-4 pts

Is there protection from the illegitimate use of physical force and freedom from war and insurgencies?	0/4
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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 north and operations against separatist movements in the southeast. Police were accused of using excessive force against participants in the #EndBadGovernance demonstrations in August and September 2024.

Boko Haram and the Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP) remained active during the year. In March, dozens of women were abducted by Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria. About 160 people from a village in central Niger State were reportedly kidnapped by Boko Haram in May, and in July suicide bombers carried out a coordinated attack on a wedding, hospital, and funeral in the Borno State

town of Gwoza, killing 18 people. Kidnapping for ransom has been a broader problem in the country, with perpetrators including extremist militants and criminal groups. Between January and July 2024, more than 2,000 people were reportedly kidnapped across Nigeria.

A simmering conflict between farmers and the Fulani, a seminomadic Muslim ethnic group, continued to destabilize northern Nigeria in 2024. Fulani pastoralists have abandoned degraded grasslands in the north, coming into increased conflict with farmers as they travel south to find new grazing lands for their livestock. In April, Fulani gunmen allegedly killed more than 20 villagers in Kogi State amid ongoing clashes between the two groups.

F4 0-4 pts

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

1/4

Despite constitutional safeguards against ethnic discrimination, many members of 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+ people face extensive official and societal discrimination. Those convicted of engaging in same-sex relationships can be imprisoned for as long as 14 years, and 12 northern states maintain the death penalty for same-sex activity. LGBT+ people are also subject to assault by police officers during arrest, extortion attempts, and discrimination when accessing public and private services. High-profile attacks on LGBT+ targets continued in 2024. In April, for example, a mob attacked the home of a suspected leader of an LGBT+ group in Abuja, and a popular cross-dressing social media user was killed in August, also in the capital. In October, a same-sex couple was harassed and publicly beaten in River State.

G. Personal Autonomy and Individual Rights

G1 0-4 pts

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

1/4

While 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 reported that approximately 2.3 million people in northeastern Nigeria were internally displaced as of May 2024, with contributing factors including militant attacks, communal violence, and environmental degradation.

G2 0-4 pts

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

1/4

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 pastoralists and of farmers are affected by violence as the two groups clash over land and other resources. Some herding groups' grazing lands have been settled 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 marriage partner and size of family, protection from domestic violence, and control over appearance?

1/4

Despite the existence of strict laws against rape, domestic violence, female genital mutilation, and child marriage, these offenses remain widespread, with low rates of reporting and prosecution. According to the United Nations Children’s fund, about four out of 10 girls are married before the age of 18.

Women and girls in camps for displaced persons have reported sexual abuse by members of the military and other authorities. In June 2024, there were reports of sexual abuse against boys in such camps. Boko Haram’s attacks on women have been particularly egregious, with kidnapping victims often subjected to forced marriage and rape, among other acts.

Abortion is illegal unless the life of the woman is in danger. As a result, many women seek out dangerous illegal abortions, exposing themselves to medical complications. Those who face such complications often do not receive further treatment.

G4 0-4 pts

Do individuals enjoy equality of opportunity and freedom from economic exploitation?	1 / 4
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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, has been uneven. As of January 2024, all 36 states in Nigeria had incorporated the Child Rights Act into their laws.

The US State Department’s 2024 *Trafficking in Persons Report* noted that Nigeria “does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking” but is “making significant efforts to do so.” The report found that while the National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons is tasked with identifying and protecting trafficking victims among vulnerable populations, including women, children, and internally displaced people, its work remained insufficient in practice.



On Nigeria

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Country Facts

Population

218,500,000

Global Freedom Score

44/100 Partly Free

Internet Freedom Score

59/100 Partly Free

Other Years

2024

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