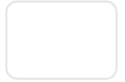


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2022 Country Report on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nigeria is a federal republic composed of 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory. In 2019, citizens re-elected President Muhammadu Buhari of the All Progressives Congress party to a second four-year term. Legislative elections were also held in 2019. Most independent observers agreed the elections were credible despite logistical challenges, localized violence, and some irregularities.

The Nigeria Police Force, which reports to the Ministry of Police and is overseen by the Police Service Commission, is the primary civilian law enforcement agency and enjoys broad jurisdiction throughout the country. The Ministry of Interior also conducts security and law enforcement activities. The Department of State Services, which reports to the national security advisor in the Office of the President, is responsible for counterintelligence, internal security, counterterrorism, and surveillance, as well as protection of senior government officials. The Nigerian Armed Forces, which reports to the minister of defense, also shares domestic security responsibilities in the case of insufficient capacity and staffing of domestic law enforcement agencies or as ordered by the president. Many states, in response to increased violence, insecurity, and criminality that exceeded the response capacity of government security forces, utilized local “security” vigilante forces. These local forces usually reported to the state governor. Civilian authorities did not always maintain effective control over the security services. There were reports members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

The insurgency in the North East region by the militant terrorist groups Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa continued. The terrorist groups conducted numerous attacks on government and civilian targets, resulting as of year’s end in thousands of deaths and injuries, numerous human rights abuses, widespread destruction, the internal displacement of more than two million persons, and the external displacement of an estimated 332,000 refugees to neighboring countries.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful and arbitrary killings; forced disappearances; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest or detention; serious problems with the independence of the judiciary; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious abuses in a conflict, including reportedly unlawful or widespread civilian deaths or harm,

enforced disappearances or abductions, torture, and physical abuses or punishment; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including violence or threats against journalists, and enforcement of criminal libel and blasphemy laws to limit expression; serious government corruption; lack of investigation and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic or intimate partner violence, sexual violence, child, early and forced marriage, female genital mutilation/cutting, and other forms of such violence; instances of coerced abortion or forced sterilization; enforcement of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and the existence of the worst forms of child labor.

The government took steps to investigate, punish, and prosecute alleged human rights abuses and corruption by officials, but impunity for such abuses and corruption remained a problem.

Nonstate actors committed arbitrary and unlawful killings, disappearances, physical abuse, and other mistreatment. Boko Haram-inspired terrorist groups and the Islamic State in West Africa continued attacks on civilians, military, police, humanitarian, and religious targets; recruited and forcefully conscripted child soldiers; and carried out scores of attacks on population centers in the North East region and in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger. Abductions by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa continued. Both groups subjected many women and girls to gender-based violence, including forced marriages, sexual slavery, and rape. The government investigated attacks by Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa and took steps to counter the growth of the insurgency. Individuals believed to be associated with the Eastern Security Network, the armed wing of the separatist group the Indigenous People of Biafra, staged attacks on security personnel, civilians, and government offices, including police stations in the South East region. Criminal gangs killed civilians and conducted mass kidnappings that particularly targeted school-age children in the North West region.

Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person

a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings

There were reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary, unlawful, or extrajudicial killings. At times authorities investigated and held accountable police, military, or other security force personnel responsible for the use of excessive or deadly force, or for the deaths of persons in custody. Instances of unlawful or extrajudicial killings in the army, air force, and navy were initially investigated by commanding officers who decided whether an accusation merited low-level discipline or the initiation of court martial proceedings, which were subject to appeal before military councils and the civilian Court of Appeals. The army's Civil-Military Legal Desks worked as ombudspersons to investigate and resolve citizen allegations of abuse, including killings, during military operations. The government regularly utilized disciplinary boards, judicial panels of inquiry, or internal complaint mechanisms to investigate such abuses by security forces. When warranted, these bodies proposed disciplinary measures to the state or federal government. State and federal panels of inquiry investigating suspicious deaths did not always make their findings public. Courts martial in Maiduguri convicted soldiers of murder.

On April 3, police shot and killed Osun State Polytechnic student Afolabi Abiola during a raid at a friend's apartment in Iree. There were no reports of investigations or prosecutions regarding Abiola's killing.

In early April, according to reports, members of the Ogun State Special Weapons Tactics unit killed a commercial motorbike operator named Abiodun Oladele while in police custody. Oladele was part of a

protest following the death of a motorcyclist rammed by a Nigerian Customs Service vehicle during a car chase. According to Oladele's elder brother, other suspects released on bail told him they witnessed Oladele being abused by police. There were no reports of investigations or prosecutions regarding Oladele's death.

There were reports of arbitrary and unlawful killings related to internal conflicts in the North East region and other areas (see section 1.g.). For example, in December, a series of investigative reports by news service Reuters alleged that since 2013, the military had committed extrajudicial killings of children (see section 1.g.) and nonconsensual abortions, some of which resulted in deaths (see section 6, Women, Reproductive Rights).

State-sponsored vigilante groups committed extrajudicial killings (see section 6, Other Societal Violence or Discrimination).

Following the #EndSARS (Special Anti-Robbery Squad) protests in 2020, the federal government established judicial panels of inquiry investigating reports of police brutality, including killings. While compensation was paid to some victims, as of December, the government had not announced further investigations or accountability measures regarding alleged security force killings in 2020 at the Lekki Toll Gate in Lagos. The Lagos State Judicial Panel Report, the only one available to the public, was leaked to the press in November 2021, and released by the Lagos state government in December 2021. While the report remained available on the Lagos state government's public website, the Lagos state government rejected some of this panel's key findings and took no further action on recommendations or compensation to victims of the Lekki Toll Gate shootings, choosing instead to compensate victims of police brutality more broadly.

In June, terrorists reportedly connected to the Islamic State in West Africa (IS-WA) attacked a church in Ondo State and killed 40 persons, including children. Security forces arrested four suspects in August. There were no updates on their prosecution.

Criminal gangs also killed numerous persons during the year, including eight persons during an attack on a train in March (see section 1.b.).

b. Disappearance

There were reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities. According to nongovernmental organization (NGO) Amnesty International in August, the whereabouts of at least 50 suspected Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) supporters arrested in 2020 in Rivers State remained unknown. NGO Human Rights Watch stated one person last seen at the Lekki Toll Gate protests in 2020 remained missing.

On March 28, terrorist and criminal groups known as "bandits" attacked a Kaduna-bound passenger train from Abuja. The attackers used improvised explosive devices to blow up a section of the tracks and force the train to stop. The attackers kidnapped dozens of passengers (according to official accounts, 72 persons, although media reported up to 150 passengers may have been taken). On October 5, the military announced all remaining hostages had been released.

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA conducted large-scale attacks and abductions in the states of Borno, Yobe, and Adamawa (see section 1.g.).

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses

A 2017 law defines and criminalizes torture. A 2015 law prohibits torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of arrestees but fails to prescribe penalties for violators. The 2015 law only applies to the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) and federal agencies unless the individual states adopt legislation compliant with it. As of August, 30 of the country's 36 states had adopted either the 2015 law itself or compliant legislation.

The Ministry of Justice previously established a National Committee against Torture. Lack of legal and operational independence hindered the committee from carrying out its work effectively.

Local NGOs and international human rights groups reported the security services committed torture and inhuman treatment of criminal suspects, militants, detainees, and prisoners.

Amnesty International carried out investigations into human rights abuses in the states of Anambra, Imo, Ebonyi, and Abia. The organization documented 62 cases of arbitrary arrest, ill-treatment, and torture. It also reportedly reviewed video and audio recordings showing security forces using excessive force and "other unlawful means to address the rising violence."

Police used a technique commonly referred to as "parading" of arrestees, which involved walking arrestees through public spaces, subjecting them to ridicule. Bystanders sometimes taunted and hurled food and other objects at arrestees. In 2021, the Lagos state government banned police from "parading" suspects before media; however, the practice remained widespread.

The constitution specifically recognizes sharia courts for noncriminal proceedings; state laws do not compel participation by non-Muslims or Muslims in sharia courts. Sharia courts in 12 states and the FCT may prescribe punishments, such as caning, amputation, and death by stoning, although courts have always overturned death sentences on appeal. The only recorded state-sanctioned amputations occurred in 1999 and 2000.

Defendants generally did not challenge caning sentences in court as a violation of statutory law. Sharia courts usually carried out caning immediately. In some cases, convicted individuals paid fines or went to prison in lieu of caning. Defendants have the right to challenge the constitutionality of sharia criminal sentences through common law appellate courts. These courts sometimes ruled in favor of defendants who sued individual states for assault for penalties such as caning imposed by sharia courts.

In June, a Bauchi state sharia court sentenced a man to 30 lashes for stealing an electric fan from a mosque.

Female prison inmates in some cases faced the threat of rape, either from prison authorities or male prisoners in facilities not segregated by gender. One legal aid NGO reported correctional authorities generally reported to appropriate law enforcement agencies allegations of inmates raping other inmates, and often charged and prosecuted suspects. The law provides for prosecution of an officer who impregnates a female inmate but does not specifically mention rape.

Impunity, exacerbated by corruption and a weak judiciary, remained a significant problem in the security forces, especially in police, military, and the Department of State Services. The government regularly utilized disciplinary boards and mechanisms to investigate security force members and hold them accountable for crimes committed on duty, but the results of these accountability mechanisms were not always made public. The Nigeria Police Force's Complaint Response Unit worked to rebuild

trust in police among citizens by collecting complaints against officers and facilitating the resolution of these cases. In 2021, the unit published a report summarizing the number and type of complaints received and the total number of cases handled since inception. The unit was largely perceived to be a credible, albeit developing, mechanism in the government's effort to gather and respond to citizens' complaints of police misconduct.

The army's 12 Civil-Military Legal Desks coordinated with the National Human Rights Commission and the Nigerian Bar Association to investigate and resolve citizen complaints against military personnel. Although the desks were geographically distributed throughout the country, their capacity and ability to investigate cases outside of major population centers remained limited. The military continued its efforts to train personnel to comply with the law of armed conflict and international human rights law in operational settings. Courts martial in Maiduguri convicted soldiers of rape and abduction of civilians.

Prison and Detention Center Conditions

Prison and detention center conditions remained harsh and life threatening. Prisoners and detainees reportedly were subjected to gross overcrowding, inadequate medical care, food and water shortages, and other abuses. Some of these conditions resulted in deaths. The government sometimes detained suspected militants outside the formal prison system (see section 1.g.).

Abusive Physical Conditions: Overcrowding was a significant problem. As of September, prison facilities had 50 percent more inmates than designed capacity. According to the government, pretrial detainees were held with convicted prisoners, and approximately 70 percent of inmates were in pretrial detention. Authorities sometimes held female and male prisoners together, especially in rural areas. Prison authorities sometimes held juvenile suspects with adults. Many prisons were constructed 70 to 80 years ago and lacked basic facilities. Some prisons had no facilities to care for pregnant women or nursing inmates. Although the law prohibits the imprisonment of children, children lived in the prisons, and some were born there.

Several military detention facilities continued to operate, including the Giwa Barracks facility in Maiduguri, Borno State. According to press and NGO reports, the military continued to arrest and remand to military detention facilities, including Giwa Barracks, persons suspected of association with Boko Haram or ISIS-WA. Human Rights Watch reported in late September the government handover protocol with the United Nations to transfer children taken into military custody on suspicion of involvement with terrorist groups to civilian authorities for reintegration.

Lack of potable water, inadequate sewage facilities, and overcrowding sometimes resulted in dangerous and unsanitary conditions. Disease remained pervasive in cramped, poorly ventilated prison facilities, which had chronic shortages of medical supplies. Inadequate medical treatment caused some prisoners to die from treatable illnesses, such as HIV and AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis. This situation was exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although authorities attempted to isolate persons with communicable diseases, facilities often lacked adequate space, and inmates with these illnesses lived with the general prison population. Prisons provided limited health care to inmates and transferred seriously ill prisoners to government hospitals. Generally, prison officials made few efforts to provide mental health services or other accommodations to prisoners with mental disabilities (see section 6, Persons with Disabilities).

Guards and prison employees reportedly extorted inmates or levied fees on them to pay for food, prison maintenance, transport to routine court appointments, and release from prison. Only prisoners

with money or support from their families had sufficient food. Prison employees sometimes stole money provided for prisoners' food. Poor inmates sometimes relied on handouts from others to survive. Prison employees, police, and other security force personnel sometimes denied inmates food and medical treatment to punish them or extort money.

There is no legal requirement to autopsy individuals who die in custody. There were no reliable statistics on the total number of prison deaths during the year, either due to physical conditions of prisons, jails, and other detention facilities, or to prisoner-on-prisoner violence.

Administration: Authorities generally investigated credible allegations of mistreatment, but such allegations were rarely made. Proven allegations of misconduct generally led to administrative sanctions, sometimes including dismissal from government service, but rarely criminal charges.

Prison employees sometimes demanded bribes to allow access for visitors.

Independent Monitoring: Independent nongovernmental observers conducted limited monitoring of prisons. The International Committee of the Red Cross had access to police detention facilities, the Nigerian Correctional Service, and some military detention facilities.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The constitution and law prohibit arbitrary arrest and detention and provide for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court. The government sometimes did not observe these requirements.

Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees

Police and other security services have the authority to arrest individuals without a warrant if officials reasonably suspect a person committed a crime. Security forces sometimes abused this authority. Security forces frequently failed to obtain arrest warrants in cases requiring them. The government's Legal Aid Council's Duty Solicitor Scheme was unable to provide free legal advice at all government detention facilities. Where the Legal Aid Council or civil society organizations provided duty solicitors, authorities sometimes released detainees if their charges did not warrant detention before trial or were not criminal in nature.

The law requires detainees must appear before a magistrate within 48 hours, even during a state of emergency, and have access to lawyers and family members. In some instances, government and security employees did not adhere to this regulation. Police held for interrogation individuals found in the vicinity of a crime for periods ranging from a few hours to several months. Authorities sometimes asked these individuals to return for further questioning after their release.

The law requires an arresting officer to inform the accused of charges at the time of arrest, transport the accused to a police station for processing within a reasonable time, and allow the suspect to obtain counsel and post bail. Some families were afraid to approach military barracks used as detention facilities. In some cases, police detained suspects without informing them of the charges against them or allowing access to counsel and family members; such detentions often included solicitation of bribes.

Provision of bail was often arbitrary or subject to extrajudicial influence. In many areas with no functioning bail system, suspects remained incarcerated indefinitely in investigative detention. At times, authorities kept detainees incommunicado for long periods. Numerous detainees stated police

demanded bribes to take them to court hearings or to release them. Since reforms enacted in 2021, there were reports persons detained without the knowledge of the state prosecutor were released.

Authorities in Ogun State continued a program to improve management of detainee court proceedings, including helping transport of detainees to court for scheduled hearings. Legal aid clinics or other civil society groups providing free legal aid reported some success in the FCT and elsewhere working with authorities to release detainees who were held against the law.

Arbitrary Arrest: Security personnel reportedly arbitrarily arrested numerous persons during the year. According to reports, the military arbitrarily arrested and detained persons, often in unmonitored military detention facilities, in the fight against Boko Haram and ISIS-WA in the North East region (see section 1.g.). In their prosecution of corruption cases, law enforcement and intelligence agencies did not always follow due process, arresting suspects without appropriate arrest and search warrants. Security services also detained journalists and demonstrators (see sections 2.a. and 2.b.).

The Department of State Services continued to detain on national security grounds Nnamdi Kanu, leader of IPOB, which the government designated a terrorist organization in 2017, on charges including treason, terrorism, and illegal possession of firearms. In 2017, Kanu fled abroad after skipping bail. In 2021, Kanu was arrested and returned to the country. Kanu was charged with 15 felonies; however, eight charges were dropped in April. In September, Kanu's attorneys stated he was suffering from an intestinal disorder and not eating. Prison officials were providing medical care; however, Kanu's attorneys accused them of providing substandard care. In October, an appeals court in Abuja dropped all charges against Kanu and ordered his release. A separate court also ruled his extradition from abroad violated his human rights. The federal government appealed these rulings to the Federal High Court in Abuja, which in November adjourned the case indefinitely. Kanu remained incarcerated at year's end.

Pretrial Detention: Lengthy pretrial detention remained a serious problem. Detainees often waited years to gain access to a court, and in many cases, multiple adjournments resulted in years-long delays. The shortage of trial judges, trial backlogs, endemic corruption, bureaucratic inertia, and undue political influence seriously hampered the judicial system. One NGO noted there were few cases of individuals in pretrial detention longer than the maximum possible sentence. The NGO reported, however, authorities at times charged suspects with serious crimes such as terrorism, risking life imprisonment or death sentences, charges not substantiated at trial after long-term detention. Some detainees had their cases delayed because the Nigeria Police Force and the Nigerian Correctional Service did not have vehicles to transport them to court. Some persons remained in detention because authorities lost their case files. In general, the courts were plagued with inadequate, antiquated systems and procedures. Some courts began implementing virtual hearings in an effort to expedite trial procedures. The magistrates courts in the FCT initiated a new case management system to handle court scheduling and work to reduce lengthy delays in proceedings.

Civil society groups noted difficulties some individuals had in accessing legal representation, securing bail, or paying fines and bail. Legal aid providers reported cases of individuals detained by authorities for civil charges such as indebtedness not warranting detention, minor criminal offenses not requiring pretrial detention, cases in which authorities did not clearly indicate specific charges, and cases where innocent individuals were held in lieu of suspects still at large.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The constitution and law provide for an independent judiciary, but the government did not respect judicial independence and impartiality. The judicial branch remained susceptible to pressure from the executive and legislative branches as well as business interests. There were reports political leaders influenced the judiciary, particularly at the state and local levels.

There was a widespread public perception judges were easily bribed, and litigants could not rely on the courts to render impartial judgments. Many citizens encountered long delays and reported receiving “requests” from judicial officials for bribes to expedite cases or obtain favorable rulings. The constitution and the annual appropriation acts stipulate the judiciary be paid directly from the federation account as statutory transfers before other budgetary expenditures are made to maintain their autonomy and separation of powers. Federal and state governments, however, often undermined the judiciary by withholding funding and manipulating appointments.

Under the constitution, in addition to existing common law courts, states may establish courts based on sharia or customary (traditional) law. Sharia courts functioned in 12 northern states and the FCT. Customary courts functioned in most of the 36 states. The nature of a case and the consent of the parties usually determined which court had jurisdiction. Sharia criminal charges are only applicable to Muslims. Sharia courts operated under similar rules as common law courts, including standard substantive due process considerations. In the case of sharia courts, the impetus to use them over civil courts stemmed in part from perceptions of inefficiency, cost, and corruption in the common law system.

Defendants have the right to challenge the constitutionality of sharia criminal sentences through common law appellate courts. These courts sometimes found for defendants in cases where defendants sued individual states for assault for penalties, such as flogging, imposed by sharia courts.

Sharia courts may pass sentences based on the sharia penal code. These may include *hudood* offenses (serious criminal offenses with punishments prescribed in the Quran), which provide for punishments such as caning, amputation, and death by stoning, although courts always overturned death sentences on appeal. Apostasy or heresy are not crimes in any state’s sharia courts.

Trial Procedures

The constitution provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary did not always enforce this right. Authorities did not always respect the rights of defendants. Insufficient numbers of judges and courtrooms, together with growing caseloads, often resulted in pretrial, trial, and appellate delays that could extend a trial for as many as 10 years. Although accused persons are entitled to counsel of their choice, there were reportedly some cases where defense counsel was absent from required court appearances so regularly a court might proceed with a routine hearing in the absence of counsel, except for certain offenses for which conviction carries the death penalty. If family members wanted to attend a trial, police sometimes demanded payments.

Human rights groups stated the government did not permit all terror suspects detained by the military their rights to legal representation, due process, and to be heard by a judicial authority. In previous years, rights groups, including Human Rights Watch, expressed concerns regarding inadequate access to defense counsel, a lack of interpreters, and inadequate evidence leading to an overreliance on confessions. Those whose cases were dismissed reportedly remained in detention without clear legal justification. Human rights groups also alleged in some cases dissidents and journalists were jailed

without access to legal representation or had other rights denied, such as the right to a fair and public trial.

Sharia courts usually accorded the testimony of women and non-Muslims less weight than testimony of Muslim men. Some sharia court judges allowed different evidentiary requirements for male and female defendants to prove adultery or fornication. Pregnancy, for example, was admissible evidence of a woman's adultery or fornication in some sharia courts.

Political Prisoners and Detainees

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies

Individuals and organizations may seek civil remedies for human rights abuses through domestic courts, but courts were often insufficiently independent to provide effective redress.

Property Seizure and Restitution

State and local governments forcibly evicted some residents and demolished their homes, often without sufficient notice or alternative compensation, and sometimes in violation of court orders. In February, Amnesty International reported authorities demolished the homes of approximately 60,000 persons in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, during a January redevelopment project. In August, Amnesty International reported the military and other security agencies forcibly evicted members from an Abuja community and demolished approximately 100 homes. There were no reports if any of the residents in either case received compensation for the loss of their homes.

f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The law prohibits such actions, but there were reports the government failed to respect such prohibitions. At times, police entered homes without judicial or other appropriate authorization. In their pursuit of corruption cases, law enforcement agencies allegedly carried out searches and arrests without warrants.

The government blocked websites, including Twitter in June of 2021 (see section 2.a., Censorship and Content Restrictions). Authorities lifted the block on Twitter in January.

The NGO Freedom House reported several government agencies purchased spyware that allowed them to monitor cell phone calls, texts, and geolocation.

g. Conflict-related Abuses

The insurgency in the North East region by the militant terrorist groups Boko Haram and ISIS-WA continued. The groups conducted numerous attacks on government and civilian targets, resulting as of year's end in thousands of deaths and injuries, widespread destruction of property, internal displacement of more than two million persons, and external displacement of an estimated 332,000 refugees.

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA attacked population centers, security personnel, and international organization and NGO personnel and facilities in Borno State. These groups targeted persons perceived as disagreeing with the groups' political or religious beliefs or interfering with their access to resources. ISIS-WA and Boko Haram-inspired terrorists demonstrated increased ability to conduct complex attacks against military outposts and formations, such as the Kuje Prison attack in the FCT in

July. ISIS-WA continued efforts to implement shadow governance structures in large swaths of Borno State.

Killings: Military operations against ISIS-WA, Boko Haram, and criminal bandit targets resulted in civilian deaths. On February 18, the air force reportedly killed 12 civilians, including at least four children, during an airstrike targeting bandit leaders on the border with the neighboring country of Niger. Although the air force launched an investigation into the strike, the results and follow-up measures were not made public. On April 13, the air force reportedly killed at least six children in a strike in Niger State. The air force and the Niger state government denied civilians were killed.

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA killed at least several hundred persons in numerous attacks during the year, with the deaths concentrated in the states of Borno, Adamawa, and Yobe. Some of the dead were civilians caught in crossfires, but many others were civilians specifically targeted by Boko Haram and ISIS-WA to spread terror and disorder. In December, Reuters published a report alleging the military committed numerous extrajudicial killings of children since 2013, during or following military operations in the North East region.

Abductions: While some NGO reports estimated the number of Boko Haram and ISIS-WA abductees remained at more than 2,000, the total count of the missing was unknown as towns repeatedly changed hands, and many families were still on the run or dispersed in camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs). Many abductees managed to escape captivity, but precise numbers remained unknown.

Approximately 100 girls abducted by Boko Haram from the Chibok Government Girls Secondary School in Borno State in 2014 remained in captivity. In July and August, the military found four more Chibok girls and their children in Borno State. Leah Sharibu remained the only student from the 2018 kidnapping of schoolgirls in Dapchi, Yobe State, in ISIS-WA captivity, reportedly because she refused to convert to Islam from Christianity.

In the North West region, militia groups and criminal networks caused systemic degradation of security among vulnerable communities. Their tactics included large-scale kidnapping for ransom targeting youth at boarding schools (see section 1.b.).

Physical Abuse, Punishment, and Torture: There were reports security services used excessive force in the pursuit of Boko Haram and ISIS-WA suspects, at times resulting in arbitrary arrest, detention, or abuse.

Arbitrary arrests reportedly continued in the North East region, and authorities held many individuals in poor conditions. There were reports some of the arrested and detained included children believed to be associated with Boko Haram, some of whom may have been forcibly recruited.

Sexual exploitation and abuse were a concern in IDP camps, informal camps, and local communities in and around Maiduguri, the Borno state capital, and across the North East region.

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA engaged in widespread gender-based violence against women and girls, including rape and forced marriage. Those who escaped, or whom security services or vigilante groups rescued, faced ostracism by their communities and had difficulty obtaining appropriate medical and psychosocial treatment and care.

According to the *Conduct in UN Field Missions* online portal, there was one open allegation concerning multiple incidents of sexual exploitation and rape by the country's peacekeepers deployed to Liberia, incidents alleged to have taken place between 2008 and 2015. As of September, government investigations into these allegations remained pending. The government substantiated one allegation from 2019. In this case, the United Nations repatriated the perpetrators, and the government imposed demotion, jail time, and fines. The United Nations also substantiated one allegation reported against a police officer deployed to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At year's end, the government had not reported any final action taken on this case.

Other Conflict-related Abuse: Attacks by ISIS-WA on humanitarian assistance convoys and aid workers reduced the provision of assistance to IDPs and local communities in the North East region.

Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties

a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media

Although the constitution and law provide for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, in some cases the government restricted these rights.

Freedom of Expression: There were reported cases in which the government abridged the right to speech and other expression. Critics of the government reported at times being subjected to threats, intimidation, arrest, detention, and violence.

Violence and Harassment: There were reports security services detained, harassed, and threatened journalists, sometimes for reporting on sensitive problems such as political corruption and security. Security services including the Department of State Services and police occasionally arrested and detained journalists who criticized the government, including journalist Agba Jalingo, reportedly for criticizing the sister-in-law of a politician (see Libel/Slander Laws).

According to the NGO Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ), on January 10, four officers of the National Intelligence Service (NIS) entered the offices of the website *People's Gazette* and demanded two journalists reveal their sources for a December 2021 report on the academic qualifications of NIS Director General Ahmed Abubakar Rufai. The two, Samuel Ogundipe and Hillary Essien, were not in the office at the time and the officers left.

CPJ reported that on August 12, police in Akwa Ibom State detained Chidi Ngaduiba, distributor of the newspaper *The Mail*, in place of the newspaper's publisher, Ifreke Nseowo. Authorities released Ngaduiba August 13 after a Nigeria Union of Journalists (NUJ) official promised to produce Nseowo. Nseowo, however, went into hiding and did not appear. Police told NUJ officials they wanted to charge Nseowo with criminal libel following his report that Umo Bassy Eno, a gubernatorial candidate of the ruling People's Democratic Party, had falsified his academic credentials.

Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, including Online Media: While a large and vibrant private press frequently criticized the government, authorities controlled much of the television and radio programming through the National Broadcasting Commission, which is responsible for monitoring and regulating broadcast media. The law prohibits local television stations from transmitting programming from other countries except for special religious programs, sports programs, or events of national interest. Cable and satellite transmission was less restricted.

The government used regulatory oversight at times to restrict press freedom, notably clamping down on television and radio stations. On July 24, according to media reports, the National Broadcasting Commission ordered the temporary closure of *Ozisa* radio station in Owerri, Imo State, after the station reported on the killing of seven to 14 persons in Imo, allegedly by the Ebubeagu vigilante group (see Other Societal Violence or Discrimination). The station resumed service August 3.

On August 5, the National Broadcasting Commission fined three stations five million naira (\$11,210) each for broadcasting two documentaries on heavily armed criminal groups known as bandits. One was a Trust TV documentary in March, and the other a BBC documentary in July. The Commission declared the documentaries glamorized terrorism and banditry.

In June 2021, the government announced it had indefinitely suspended Twitter's activities in the country because of the "persistent use of the platform for activities that are capable of undermining Nigeria's corporate existence." Twitter resumed activities on January 13 after lengthy negotiations with the government to unblock the platform.

Some journalists reported they practiced self-censorship. Journalists and local NGOs claimed security services intimidated journalists, including editors and owners, into censoring reports perceived to be critical of the government.

Libel/Slander Laws: Defamation is a criminal offense carrying a penalty of imprisonment for up to two years and possible fines. The government enforced this law by often arresting journalists. Authorities in 12 northern states adhering to sharia penal codes sometimes arrested individuals for blasphemy or incitement through contempt of religious creed.

In April, Mubarak Bala, president of the Nigerian Humanist Association, pled guilty to 18 counts of "insulting the religion of Islam [and] its followers in Kano State, calculated to cause a breach of public peace," punishable under the Kano State penal code. In 2020, Bala posted controversial statements mocking Islam and Muslims on Facebook, and police arrested him at his home in Kaduna State and transferred him to Kano State. Following Bala's guilty plea, the High Court of Kano sentenced him to 24 years in prison.

On August 20, police from Abuja arrested journalist Agba Jalingo in his home in Lagos. Jalingo was charged with defamation after his newspaper, *Cross River Watch*, published an article critical of the sister-in-law of Cross River State Governor Ben Ayade. There were reports police and Department of State Security agents raided the Cross River office of the newspaper while Jalingo was in custody. Jalingo was released from detention on August 21.

Jalingo was previously arrested in 2019 in Cross River State by SARS. The Economic Community of West African States Court of Justice awarded him 30 million naira (\$67,260) in 2021 as compensation for mistreatment and torture for the 2019 arrest. In March, the Federal High Court in Calabar, Cross River State, acquitted him of all charges stemming from his 2019 arrest.

In August, the Court of Appeal in Kano ordered a retrial of the death penalty conviction of Yahaya Sharif-Aminu, whom the Kano sharia court in 2020 convicted of blasphemy against Islam and sentenced to death. The High Court ordered a new trial in sharia court, citing a lack of evidence presented in the first one. Sharif-Aminu lost an appeal challenging the new trial in August and remained incarcerated pending the new trial.

National Security: At times the government restricted or otherwise instructed media to refrain from reporting on sensitive topics related to national security.

Internet Freedom

In March, the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace reported the government sometimes used platform-based blocking of internet service providers to shut down websites. Reports from prior years stated internet providers sometimes blocked websites at the request of the Nigerian Communications Commission, particularly websites advocating independence for Biafra in the South East region. On August 5, Minister of Information Lai Mohammed asked Google to block YouTube videos from terrorist organizations, specifically mentioning IPOB.

Civil society organizations and journalists expressed concern regarding the broad powers provided by the law regarding cybercrime. Some local and state governments used the law to arrest journalists, bloggers, and critics for alleged hate speech. In July, the CPJ reported the arrest of two employees of Bauchi-based *Wikkitimes* for criminal conspiracy, defamation, and cyberstalking after publishing a news report criticizing a local politician. Police held the reporters overnight and then released them on bail. Authorities dropped the cyberstalking charges but indicted the journalists on the criminal conspiracy and defamation charges. Their court case was pending at year's end.

b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

Freedom of Peaceful Assembly

The constitution and law provide for freedom of assembly. The government occasionally banned and targeted gatherings when it concluded their political, ethnic, or religious nature might lead to unrest. The government put limitations on public gatherings, including temporary bans on congregational worship services in some states, in response to COVID-19.

In areas experiencing societal violence, police and other security services permitted public meetings and demonstrations on a case-by-case basis.

The army, national police, and other security services sometimes used excessive force to disperse protesters. Police forces engaging in crowd control operations generally attempted to disperse crowds using nonlethal tactics, such as firing tear gas, before escalating their use of force.

On May 31, a peaceful protest occurred in the Osun State capital of Osogbo in response to an April 3 killing in Iree (see section 1.a.). Police allegedly opened fire on the protesters, wounding Toba Adedeji, correspondent for *The Nation* newspaper. Authorities conducted no investigation.

Freedom of Association

The constitution and law provide for the right to associate freely with other persons in political parties, trade unions, or other special interest organizations. While the government generally respected this right, authorities abrogated it for some groups.

The law effectively renders illegal all forms of activity supporting or promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) rights. The law criminalizes the registration, operation, or participation in so-called gay clubs, societies, or organizations and further prohibits any support to

such organizations (see section 6). Rights groups reported the law had a significant chilling effect on free association.

c. Freedom of Religion

See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country

The constitution and law provide for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and authorities generally respected these related rights.

In-country Movement: In areas subject to frequent attacks or depredations by Boko Haram, ISIS-WA, or groups associated with them, residents often found themselves subject to roadblocks, searches, and other restrictive security measures.

e. Protection of Refugees

The government cooperated with the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other persons of concern through the National Commission for Refugees, Migrants, and IDPs.

Access to Asylum: The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government has established a system for providing protection to refugees.

Access to Basic Services: Legal documentation, such as birth certificates, national identity cards, certificates of indigeneity, and voter registration, were the key civil documentation to prove state of origin and nationality. They were also necessary to access services such as health care and education. In 2020, UNHCR reported continuing concerns regarding ineffective and nonexistent civil registration and identification management systems in areas hosting refugees and returnees. Some refugees faced difficulties obtaining work and accessing basic services like health care even after receiving legal documentation. For refugees, even when civil documents were obtained, community members and local officials were sometimes unaware of their legal rights or standing, which could also prevent them from moving freely, obtaining work, or accessing health care.

Temporary Protection: The government also provided temporary protection to individuals who might not qualify as refugees and provided it to approximately 300 persons.

f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons

As of year's end, the UN Refugee Agency reported there were approximately 2.2 million persons displaced in the North East region. There were approximately 475,000 displaced persons in the North West region and approximately 500,000 in the North Central region. Insurgency was the reason for the vast majority of displacements, followed by communal clashes.

IDPs, especially those in the North East region, faced severe protection problems, including terrorist attacks or bombings, lack of accountability for and diversion of humanitarian aid, drug abuse, hostility, insecurity, and gender-based violence, including sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse (see section 1.g.). Security services continued to arrest and detain suspected Boko Haram and ISIS-WA

members at IDP camps and in host communities, sometimes arbitrarily and with insufficient evidence, and restricted family access to detainees.

The government did not always promote the safe, voluntary, and dignified return, resettlement, or integration of IDPs. The Borno state government continued the process to return more than 80,000 IDPs residing in and around Maiduguri to their places of origin or resettle them in a third location. The Borno state government did not always include international humanitarian actors in the planning or implementation of these returns, at times promoted the option of moving IDPs back to insecure areas, and sometimes returned IDPs to areas without adequate services and support mechanisms. There were reports the Borno state government was closing IDP camps and sending IDPs back to communities under threat from terrorist groups. In August, UNICEF reported the Borno state government had slated for closure the final three IDP camps in Maiduguri. In November, Human Rights Watch reported the shutdowns compelled displaced persons to leave the camps without consultation, adequate information, or sustainable alternatives for their safety and livelihoods.

The government at times restricted humanitarian NGOs' or international organizations' access to IDPs. The military prohibited humanitarian organizations from delivering assistance outside of areas under its direct control due to increasing insecurity and Boko Haram and ISIS-WA targeting of humanitarian convoys. The Borno state government also required humanitarian actors to notify it in advance of movements within accessible areas and to travel with military escorts along certain routes. Inaccessibility to areas of return due to control by Boko Haram and ISIS-WA also created severe protection concerns for many civilians and assistance agencies.

g. Stateless Persons

The government does not require birth registration, and the majority of births were unregistered. The *2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey*, the most recent source of data available, found only 42 percent of births of children younger than five were registered. Most persons did not become stateless because of their lack of birth registration; however, there were some reported cases where the government denied individuals citizenship because they did not have a birth registration and did not have another way to prove their citizenship. The law and implementing policies afford the opportunity to confirm or acquire citizenship.

Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process

The law provides citizens the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections based on universal and equal suffrage and conducted by secret ballot.

Elections and Political Participation

Recent Elections: Most independent observers agreed the 2019 executive and legislative elections were credible despite logistical challenges, localized violence, and some irregularities, including reports of vote buying, voter intimidation, and theft of voting materials. The Independent National Electoral Commission investigated reports of voter intimidation and introduced the Bi-Modal Voter Accreditation System, which used biometrics to verify the identities of voters.

Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups: No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process, and they did participate. Observers attributed fewer leadership opportunities for women in major parties and government, particularly in the north, to religious, cultural, and economic barriers. The NGO Gender Strategy Advancement International

reported in June that political violence and women's lower educational levels further stifled women's participation in politics. The number of women candidates was disproportionately low. There were no known openly LGBTQI+ political candidates.

Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government

Although the law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, the government did not consistently implement the law. There were numerous reports of government corruption.

Corruption: Massive and widespread corruption affected all levels of government, including the judiciary and security services.

The bulk of anticorruption efforts by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission remained focused on low- and mid-level government officials, although both organizations brought indictments against various active and former high-level government officials. Many of the corruption cases, particularly the high-profile ones, remained pending before the courts due to administrative or procedural delays.

In March, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission arrested former governor of Anambra State Willie Obiano for misappropriation of public funds hours after he left office and thereby relinquished immunity from civil and criminal liability. As of year's end, the case continued.

In July, an appeals court in Lagos sentenced former Delta State senator Peter Nwaoboshi to seven years in prison for fraud and money laundering.

Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials sometimes cooperated and responded, but generally dismissed allegations, did not provide a substantive response, and did not publicize any investigation they conducted.

Government Human Rights Bodies: The law establishes the National Human Rights Commission as an independent nonjudicial mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights. The commission monitors human rights through its zonal affiliates in the country's six political regions. The commission is mandated to investigate allegations of human rights abuses and publishes periodic reports detailing its findings, including torture and poor prison conditions, but served more in an advisory, training, and advocacy role. Observers considered the commission to be independent and somewhat effective. The commission began to gather the #EndSARS investigative panel reports from around the country, with the object of adjudicating compensation claims.

Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

Women

Rape and Domestic Violence: The law criminalizes rape of women and domestic violence, but not rape of men. Spousal rape is not criminalized. The government did not effectively enforce the law.

Sentences for persons convicted of rape and sexual assault were inconsistent and often minor. Federal law provides penalties ranging from 12 years to life imprisonment for offenders older than 14 and a maximum of 14 years' imprisonment for offenders aged 14 and younger. It also provides for a public register of convicted sexual offenders and appointment of protection officers at the local government level to coordinate with courts and provide for survivors to receive various forms of assistance (e.g., medical, psychosocial, legal, rehabilitative, and for reintegration) provided by the law. The law also includes provisions to protect the identity of rape survivors and empower courts to award appropriate compensation to survivors. Because the relevant federal law had not been adopted in all states, state law continued to govern most rape and sexual assault cases and typically allowed for lesser sentences. While some, mostly southern, states enacted laws prohibiting some forms of gender-based violence or sought to safeguard certain rights, most states did not have such legislation. Survivors generally had little or no recourse to justice.

Police often refused to intervene in domestic violence cases or blamed the victim for provoking the abuse. In rural areas, courts and police were reluctant to intervene to protect women who formally accused their husbands of abuse if the level of alleged abuse did not exceed local customary norms.

Prison guards reportedly engaged in gender-based violence against women prisoners (see section 1.c.).

Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C): Federal law criminalizes FGM/C. The law penalizes persons performing female circumcision or genital mutilation or anyone aiding or abetting such a person. Enforcement of the law was rare.

A February report from the UN Population Fund found 22 of 36 states had laws against FGM/C. NGOs found they had to convince local authorities these state laws applied in their districts.

The *2018 Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey* found 20 percent of women ages 15 to 49 had undergone FGM/C. The federal government launched a revised national policy on the elimination of FGM/C for 2020-24.

Other Forms of Gender-based Violence: According to the law, any person convicted of subjecting another person to harmful traditional practices may be punished with up to four years' imprisonment, a fine, or both. For purposes of the law, harmful traditional practices mean all traditional behavior, attitudes, or practices negatively affecting the fundamental human rights of women or girls, including denial of inheritance or succession rights, FGM/C, forced marriage, and forced isolation from family and friends.

Despite this federal law, *purdah* (the cultural practice of secluding women and pubescent girls from unrelated men) continued in parts of the north. "Confinement," which occurred predominantly in the North East region, remained the most common rite of deprivation for widows. Confined widows were subject to social restrictions for as long as one year and usually shaved their heads and dressed in black as part of a culturally mandated mourning period. In other areas communities viewed a widow as a part of her husband's property to be "inherited" by his family. In some traditional southern communities, widows fell under suspicion when their husbands died. To prove their innocence, they were forced to drink the water used to clean their deceased husbands' bodies.

Sexual Harassment: No statutes prohibit sexual harassment, but assault statutes provide for prosecution of violent harassment, with penalties of up to three years' imprisonment. The law

criminalizes stalking. The law also criminalizes emotional, verbal, and psychological abuse and acts of intimidation. Enforcement was uncommon.

The practice of demanding sexual favors in exchange for employment or university grades remained common.

Reproductive Rights: In December, Reuters alleged a long-standing secret military program of forced or coerced abortions for women and girls who had either escaped or been rescued from Boko Haram captivity. The military reportedly employed either surgical procedures or abortion-causing pills or injections, often without consent or knowledge, with the victims subjected to unspecified medical care. Some of the alleged victims died from the surgery or drugs. Reuters estimated at least 10,000 procedures were carried out on pregnant individuals since 2013. Various NGOs and human rights organizations began their own investigations in response to the allegations, some expressing skepticism, and some recounting their own concerns from earlier reports. Some of these groups recounted cultural and religious objections to abortion – which is illegal, except to save a mother's life – among populations subject to Boko Haram depredations as reasons to doubt the Reuters report. Others noted the strong stigmatization of women survivors of Boko Haram sexual abuse and of any resulting children as a possible motivator for abortions. On December 16, the chief of defense staff called on the National Human Rights Commission to launch an investigation of the Reuters allegations and stated the military would cooperate.

Many couples and individuals did not have access to the information and the means to access safe, effective, and affordable methods of family planning. Traditional practices often hampered a woman's choice on family size. Information on reproductive health and access to quality reproductive health services and emergency obstetric care were not widely available.

The National Health Insurance Scheme did not always cover family planning services. Health insurance covered family planning counseling but not contraceptives. Conversations regarding sex and sexuality matters were taboo in many places, posing a barrier to access for youth who might need services and information from health-care providers.

In some states, health-care workers frequently required women to provide proof of spousal consent prior to accessing contraceptives. Pediatricians provided primary care for adolescents through 18 years of age. Adolescent-friendly reproductive health services and interventions were usually not provided within the health system. Pregnant girls were generally not allowed to attend school (see section 6, Children, Education). Emergency contraceptives were available as part of family planning method mix; however, there were some barriers to women receiving them. For example, there were reports unmarried women were denied emergency contraceptives by health-care providers.

Low literacy and low economic empowerment among couples hampered effective access to skilled health attendance during pregnancy and delivery. Government insurance policies sometimes provided for free antenatal services.

Lack of access to primary health-care facilities in rural and hard-to-reach areas with poor transportation and communications infrastructure impacted access to antenatal care and skilled birth delivery. The cost of services was also a barrier. Gender norms limited access to health services, including for reproductive and maternal health; women who were financially or socially dependent on men might be unable to access health care without seeking consent from their spouses.

In the northern part of the country, societal and cultural norms played a role in women not leaving the house unaccompanied or not accessing reproductive health services. Some women also preferred to deliver their babies using traditional birth attendants for cultural reasons and due to the affordability of their services.

The government received support from donors to provide access to age-appropriate sexual and reproductive health services for survivors of sexual violence. Sexual violence survivors who sought and had access to care received HIV testing services, provision of post-exposure prophylaxis (within 72 hours), pre-exposure prophylaxis for clients without HIV, antiretroviral services for clients with HIV, provision of emergency contraceptives (within 120 hours), testing and treatment for sexually transmitted diseases, legal support where required, and other services, such as referrals for longer-term psychosocial support and economic empowerment programs.

Emergency health-care services were mostly provided by private hospitals. Post-abortion care was limited.

The 2018 *Nigeria Demographic and Health Survey* reported a maternal mortality rate of 512 deaths per 100,000 live births due to several factors, including lack of access to antenatal care, skilled birth attendants, emergency obstetric care, and other medical services. According to the survey, 67 percent of births in 2018 were attended by skilled health personnel.

Discrimination: Although the constitution provides the same legal status and rights for women as for men, and there were no known legal restrictions on women's working hours or jobs deemed too dangerous for women, women faced discrimination in hiring in certain industries such as construction, energy, and agriculture. Women experienced considerable economic discrimination. The law does not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, nor does it mandate nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring. The government did not effectively enforce the law.

Women generally remained marginalized. No laws prohibit women from owning land, but customary land tenure systems allowed only men to own land, with women gaining access to land only via marriage or family. Many customary practices did not recognize a woman's right to inherit property, and many widows became destitute when their in-laws took the deceased husband's property.

In the 12 northern states adhering to sharia, religious and social norms affected women to varying degrees. For example, in Zamfara State, local governments enforced laws requiring the separation of Muslim men and women in transportation and health care.

Women could arrange but not post bail at most police detention facilities.

Women in the LGBTQI+ community faced systemic discrimination due to federal laws outlawing same-sex relationships and cultural attitudes (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics).

Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

The law prohibits ethnic discrimination by the government, but most ethnic groups claimed marginalization in terms of government revenue allocation, political representation, or both. The federal and state governments made some efforts to enforce the law.

The country's ethnically diverse population consisted of more than 250 groups speaking 395 different languages. Many were concentrated geographically. Three major groups – Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba – together constituted approximately one-half the population. Members of all ethnic groups reportedly practiced ethnic discrimination, particularly in private sector hiring patterns and the segregation of urban neighborhoods. A long history of tension existed among some ethnic groups. The government's efforts to address tensions among ethnic groups typically involved focused security actions, incorporating police, military, and other security services, often in the form of a joint task force.

The constitution requires the government to have a “federal character,” meaning cabinet and other high-level positions must be distributed to persons representing each of the 36 states or each of the six geopolitical regions. President Buhari's cabinet appointments conformed to this policy. Traditional relationships were used to pressure government officials to favor particular ethnic groups in the distribution of important positions and other patronage.

All citizens have the right to live in any part of the country, but state and local governments frequently discriminated against ethnic groups not indigenous to their areas, occasionally compelling individuals to return to a region where their ethnic group originated but where they no longer had ties. State and local governments sometimes compelled nonindigenous persons to move by threats, discrimination in hiring and employment, or destruction of their homes. Those who chose to stay sometimes experienced further discrimination, including denial of scholarships and exclusion from employment in the civil service, police, and military.

Land disputes, competition concerning dwindling resources, and ethnic and “settler-indigene” tensions contributed to clashes between herdsman and farmers throughout the North Central region. Religious affiliation also contributed to and exacerbated some local conflicts. Many international organizations, including the International Crisis Group, assessed identity-based divisions were incidental to the resource-based conflict, but such conflict increased polarization and tension along religious lines. Conflicts concerning land rights continued among members of the Tiv, Kwalla, Jukun, Fulani, and Azara ethnic groups living near the convergence of the states of Nasarawa, Benue, and Taraba.

The government engaged in efforts to quell intercommunal conflict. Various early warning systems operating throughout the North Central and North West regions were also responsible for preventing attacks from occurring. The Plateau Peacebuilding Agency actively promoted and spread its peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts through the development of intercommunal early warning systems that were able to check simmering conflict before it erupted into violence.

The government further implemented substantial reforms in the cattle-rearing industry, with input from state and local stakeholders to facilitate and incentivize ranching over herding to combat sources of rural violence. To implement the National Livestock Transformation Policy, the federal government in November 2021 began to receive applications from states to disburse funds allocated for herding-to-ranching projects.

In Kano State, the government took special steps to stem insecurity that spurred ethnic tensions. The Kano Interreligious Council, the Kano Peace Commission, and the State Commission for Religious Affairs brought persons together to discuss problems with the potential to disrupt public cohesion. The state government further invited herders and their cattle to occupy the Rogo Forest on Kano State's western border with Kaduna State, where they would not cross paths with farmers, and

incentivized the move with the establishment of rural feeder roads, water service, schools, and health facilities in the area.

Children

Birth Registration: Children derive their citizenship from their parents. The government does not require birth registration, and the majority of births were unregistered. Lack of documents did not result in denial of education, health care, or other public services. Birth registration was provided on a nondiscriminatory basis, and there was no significant difference in birth registration rates based on the sex of the child.

Education: The law requires provision of tuition-free, compulsory, and universal basic education for every child of primary and junior secondary school age. According to the constitution, women and girls are supposed to receive career and vocational guidance at all levels, as well as access to quality education, education advancement, and lifelong learning. Despite these provisions, extensive discrimination and impediments to women's and girls' participation in education persisted, particularly in the north. The lowest attendance rates were in the north.

Pregnant girls were generally not allowed to attend school, with some schools reportedly conducting pregnancy tests before admitting them.

The North East region had the lowest primary school attendance rate. The most pronounced reason was the Boko Haram and ISIS-WA insurgencies, which prevented thousands of children from continuing their education in Borno State and Yobe State (due to destruction of schools, community displacement, and mass movement of families from those crisis states to safer areas). Attacks on schools and kidnappings exacerbated the situation.

Schools in the FCT and Jigawa State were closed in July and August due to concerns of schoolchildren being abducted (see section 1.b.). In April, UNICEF announced more than 11,000 schools had closed due to security concerns since 2000.

Child Abuse: There are laws against child abuse; however, these laws require ratification by each state, and not all states have ratified them. Child abuse remained common throughout the country, but the government took no significant measures to combat it.

In some states, children accused of witchcraft were killed or suffered abuse such as kidnapping and torture.

So-called baby factories operated, often disguised as orphanages, religious or rehabilitation centers, hospitals, or maternity homes. They sold newborns of pregnant women – mostly unmarried girls – who were sometimes held against their will and raped. The persons running the factories sold the children for various purposes, including adoption, child labor, child trafficking, or sacrificial rituals, with boys fetching higher prices. In June, police rescued 35 teenage girls from an alleged baby factory in a hotel in Anambra State, where traffickers had subjected the girls to sex trafficking. Police arrested three suspects. In July, police rescued three women from a baby factory in Delta State. Two suspects in the case remained at large.

Child, Early, and Forced Marriage: Federal law sets a minimum age of 18 for marriage for both boys and girls. While 32 states have adopted the law, many states, especially northern states, did not uphold the federal minimum age. In some states, children as young as 11 can be legally married under

customary or religious law. The government continued to work with local and international partners to engage religious leaders, emirs, and sultans on the problem, emphasizing the health hazards of early marriage. Certain states worked with NGO programs to establish school subsidies or fee waivers for children to help protect against early marriage. The government did not take significant legal steps to end sales of young girls into marriage.

Boko Haram and other terrorist groups subjected abducted girls to forced marriage.

Sexual Exploitation of Children: The law prohibits child commercial sexual exploitation, child sex trafficking, and sexual intercourse with a child, although it does not explicitly mention sale or grooming. The minimum age for sexual consent varies according to state law. According to the constitution, “full age” means the age of 18, but it creates an exception for any married woman who “shall be deemed of full age.”

The law criminalizes the production, procurement, distribution, and possession of child pornography. Enforcement of the law remained uneven.

Sexual exploitation of children remained a significant problem. Children were exploited in commercial sex, both within the country and in other countries. There were reports girls were victims of sexual exploitation in IDP camps.

The government expanded efforts to identify victims of exploitation in IDP camps. For example, the government continued a screening and sensitization campaign to identify sex trafficking survivors in IDP camps in Borno State. The National Agency for the Prohibition of Trafficking in Persons also collaborated with the Borno state government, international organizations, and NGOs to operate the Borno State Antitrafficking Task Force.

Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities: Media reports indicated some communities killed infants born as twins or with birth defects or albinism. Prosecution of perpetrators remained uneven.

Displaced Children: According to UNICEF, as of 2020, children made up approximately 60 percent of an estimated 2.2 million persons displaced in the North East region. There were displaced children among IDP populations in other parts of the north as well. Many children were homeless.

Antisemitism

Although accounting for far less than 1 percent of the population, there were three distinct Jewish communities. The smallest of these were mostly foreigners, whom Israel and the Diaspora recognized. A larger group of several thousand indigenous Jews were not recognized internationally. There were also Judaic-oriented groups, including Sabbatarians, the members of which adopted many Jewish customs but were essentially Christian. There were no known reports of antisemitic acts.

Trafficking in Persons

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

Organ Harvesting

Reports of organ harvesting persisted. Statistics concerning its prevalence were almost nonexistent. The law does not require transplant donors to consent to any transplant.

In June, police arrested Enugu state politician Ike Ekweremadu at Heathrow Airport in London. Ekweremadu was accused of trafficking a man, age 21, from Nigeria to the United Kingdom to harvest the man's kidney for transplant to Ekweremadu's daughter. Ekweremadu's wife and a Nigerian doctor residing in the United Kingdom were also arrested as part of the investigation. Ekweremadu remained in custody in the United Kingdom with a trial scheduled to begin in 2023.

Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics

Criminalization: The law criminalizes the public display of same-sex "amorous affection." In the 12 states with sharia, adults convicted of engaging in same-sex sexual conduct may be subject to execution by stoning. Although men have been convicted and imprisoned under sharia, none were executed during the year.

In June, authorities arrested three men in Bauchi State for engaging in homosexuality. A sharia court sentenced them to death by stoning. They appealed the sentence, and the men remained incarcerated with the appeal pending at year's end.

Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons: LGBTQI+ persons reported threats and violence against them based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity, according to the NGO The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS). The NGO documented 520 human rights abuses based on real or perceived sexual orientation, gender expression, and sex characteristics during the year. Of these cases, more than 10 percent involved state actors. Invasion of privacy, arbitrary arrest, and unlawful detention were the most common abuses perpetrated by officers and other state actors. Blackmail, extortion, assault, and battery were the most common abuses perpetrated by nonstate actors.

Discrimination: LGBTQI+ persons reported discrimination based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. The law does not provide protections for or prohibit discrimination against LGBTQI+ persons and forbids same-sex marriage and civil unions. LGBTQI+ persons persistently faced stigma, discrimination, and barriers to accessing basic health care. These included limiting physical access to facilities, challenges communicating with health-care providers, discriminatory or negative attitudes among health-care workers, and higher user fees. LGBTQI+ persons also faced barriers in obtaining employment and securing housing. Many LGBTQI+ persons reported security officials asked for bribes after being caught engaging in "homosexual activities."

Availability of Legal Gender Recognition: Legal gender recognition was not available. There were no mechanisms to change the gender assigned at birth on legal documents.

Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals: There are no laws regulating "conversion therapy." A report on "conversion" practices by TIERS in 2021 found approximately half of the survey's LGBTQI+ respondents had been subjected to "conversion therapy." Religious institutions – Christian, Muslim, and traditional religions – all performed rituals alleged to "cure" homosexuality. These rituals were often coded as "deliverance from evil spirits." Families, classmates, and community members of LGBTQI+ individuals often pressured the individuals into joining a "conversion" program.

Approximately 20 percent of respondents to the TIERS report stated they suffered physical abuse during “conversion” therapy programs. Approximately 6 percent were locked in conversion facilities without freedom of movement.

“Aversion Therapy,” which involved causing sickness or using electrical shocks in LGBTQI+ victims when they were sexually aroused, was used, but was not common.

Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly: The law restricts many forms of activity supporting or promoting the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. For example, the law forbids the registration of LGBTQI+ organizations, and criminalizes support for LGBTQI+ organizations, marriages, or civil unions. Multiple LGBTQI+ NGOs, however, operated legally by pursuing related goals, such as legal advice or HIV and AIDS awareness.

Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities often faced restrictions to equal access. While the law prohibits discrimination based on disability and provides persons with disabilities the right to equal access to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation, persons with disabilities often did not have such access. The government did not always enforce the law.

Persons with disabilities faced social stigma, exploitation, and discrimination, and relatives often regarded them as a source of shame. Many indigent persons with disabilities begged on the streets. Mental health-care services were almost nonexistent.

Children with disabilities faced significant hurdles obtaining educational services. A report from the Joint National Association of Persons with Disabilities stated primary and secondary students with disabilities were confined to understaffed and underequipped schools. Inclusion programs in mainstream schools were rare.

Persons with disabilities faced significant barriers to civic participation. In February, the government signed the Electoral Act Amendment, which included provisions for improving access to voting for persons with disabilities.

Other Societal Violence or Discrimination

State-sponsored vigilante groups proliferated in recent years as the security situation deteriorated. These groups tended to be from the same geographic area or ethnic group and were usually created by order of a state governor. Support from the federal government varied from tacit acceptance to outright hostility. There was minimal accountability for these groups, and they operated with near impunity.

For example, in 2021, a group called Ebubeagu was formed in the South East region. Ebubeagu operated primarily in Ebonyi State and Imo State. Media alleged the group committed multiple human rights abuses. In January, Ebubeagu allegedly abused and killed a robbery suspect in Ebonyi State. In July, Ebubeagu members in Imo State allegedly shot and killed multiple persons returning home from a wedding. Reports on the number of dead varied between seven to 14. The governor of Imo State, Hope Uzodinma, denied Ebubeagu’s involvement and stated “bandits” committed the crimes, and were using alleged Ebubeagu involvement for propaganda. There were no reports of investigations or prosecutions related to either of these cases.

In October, Ebubeagu also reportedly intimidated political rivals of Ebonyi State Governor Dave Umahi, including senate candidate Linus Okorie.

In the South West region, the Western Nigeria Security Network, known as Amotekun, operated in the states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, and Oyo. Formed in 2020, Amotekun allegedly committed human rights abuses. In June, Amotekun members attempting to arrest university students allegedly shot and killed a student in Ondo State. There were no reports on investigations or prosecutions related to the shooting.

Members of both Christian and Muslim groups continued to report some state and local government laws discriminated against them, including by limiting their rights to freedom of expression and assembly and to obtain government employment.

Persons born with albinism faced discrimination, were considered bad luck, and were sometimes abandoned at birth or killed for witchcraft purposes.

In general, persons with HIV faced widespread stigma and discrimination. Persons with HIV and AIDS were often ostracized by the community, fired from their jobs, or cast away from family. The federal and state governments continue to work with international donors and NGOs to reduce stigma and change perceptions of persons living with HIV and AIDS. The government also worked to reduce hesitancy in HIV testing and treatment.

Various reports indicated street mobs attacked suspected criminals. In many cases, these mob actions did not result in arrests. These attacks were reported to stem from a lack of faith in police and judicial systems.

There were also reports of mobs committing violence following allegations of blasphemy. See the Department of State's *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

On May 12, a mob killed Deborah Samuel Yakubu, a Christian university student at Shehu Shagari College of Education in Sokoto, after she allegedly made blasphemous statements regarding Islam on a student WhatsApp chat. Authorities arrested two suspects the following day, leading to rioting and attacks on churches in Sokoto by individuals protesting the arrests.

Section 7. Worker Rights

a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining

The law provides workers the right to form or belong to a trade union or other association, conduct legal strikes, and bargain collectively. Some statutory limitations substantially restrict these rights. The law prohibits antiunion discrimination but does not adequately protect against it.

Substantial restrictions on the rights of workers to form and join a union include, for example, the requirement of prior authorization or approval by the ministry to establish a union. By law a trade union may be registered only if there is no other union already registered in the particular trade or profession and if it has a minimum of 50 members, a threshold most new organizations could not meet. Lengthy notice periods and an unlimited timeline for the ministry to deliberate on objections to

union formation could prevent legitimate worker organization. In addition, penalties were imposed for organizing or joining an organization not officially recognized.

Trade unions must meet various registration requirements to be legally established. A three-month notice period, starting from the date of publication of an application for registration in the *Nigeria Official Gazette*, must elapse before a trade union may be registered. If the Ministry of Labor and Employment does not receive objections to registration during the three-month notice period, it must register the union within three months of the expiration of the notice period. If an objection is raised, the ministry has an indefinite period to review and deliberate on the registration. The registrar may refuse registration because a proper objection has been raised or because a purpose of the trade union is illegal. The law does not explain what an appropriate objection or illegal purpose may be. Each federation must consist of 12 or more affiliated trade unions, and each trade union must be an exclusive member in a single federation.

The law generally does not provide for a union's ability to conduct its activities without interference from the government. The law narrowly defines what union activities are legal.

The law places limits on the scope of collective bargaining. For example, the law stipulates every collective agreement on wages be registered with the National Salaries, Income, and Wages Commission, which decides whether the agreement becomes binding. The law places legal restrictions on workers' right to strike. For example, the law requires a majority vote of all registered union members to call a strike and limits the right to strike to certain types of labor disputes such as those arising from an employment contract or related to wages and conditions of work. Strike actions, including many in nonessential services, may be subject to a compulsory arbitration procedure leading to a final award, which is binding on the parties concerned. Strikes based on disputed national economic policy are prohibited. Penalties for participating in an illegal strike include fines and imprisonment for up to six months.

Workers and employers in export-processing zones (EPZs) have fewer legal protections than other workers. For example, although EPZ workers may organize and engage in collective bargaining, there are no explicit provisions providing them the right to organize their administration and activities without interference by the government. The law does not allow worker representatives free access to the EPZs to organize workers, and it prohibits workers from striking for 10 years following the commencement of operations by the employer within a zone. In addition, the Nigerian Export Processing Zones Authority, which the federal government created to manage the EPZ program, has exclusive authority to handle the resolution of disputes between employers and employees, thereby limiting the autonomy of the bargaining partners.

The law defines "essential services" more broadly than recommended by the International Labor Organization (ILO), disallowing labor protections for public employees, for example, of the central bank, the stamp and currency authority, postal service, transportation workers, and immigration officials.

Common government and employer practices limited or violated worker rights. Many alleged cases were reported of antiunion discrimination and obstruction of collective bargaining. Specific acts included denial of the right to join trade unions, massive dismissals for trying to join trade unions, mass repression of union members, intimidation of union leadership officials, and arrests of union members. Media reports alleged MTN, the largest mobile network company in Africa, denied the right to collective bargaining and organization to its workers.

While workers exercised some of their rights, the government generally did not effectively enforce applicable laws. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations and were rarely applied.

In many cases, workers' fear of negative repercussions inhibited their reporting of antiunion activities. According to labor representatives, police rarely gave permission for public demonstrations and routinely used force to disperse protesters.

Collective bargaining occurred throughout the public sector and the organized private sector but remained restricted in some parts of the private sector, particularly in banking and telecommunications. According to the International Trade Union Confederation, the government and some private-sector employers occasionally failed to honor their collective agreements.

b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits and criminalizes most forms of forced or compulsory labor, including by children, except compulsory prison labor. The government did not effectively enforce the law in many parts of the country. The government took steps to identify or eliminate forced labor, but often failed to complete investigations in a timely manner, or at all.

Forced labor occurred in multiple sectors of the economy, with reports of women and girls subjected to forced labor in domestic service and boys subjected to forced labor in street vending, domestic service, mining, stone quarrying, agriculture, and begging.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings/>.

d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation

The law prohibits discrimination in employment and occupation based on disability. The law does not prohibit discrimination in employment and occupation based on race, religion, national origin, color, sex, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation or gender identity, HIV and AIDS status, or refugee or stateless status.

Women are legally barred from particular fields of employment, such as mining (see section 6, Women, Discrimination). Women often experienced discrimination due to traditional and religious practices. Police regulations provide for special recruitment requirements and conditions of service applying to women, particularly the criteria and provisions relating to pregnancy and marital status.

The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities and provides them the right to education without discrimination or segregation and the right to work on an equal basis with others, including the right to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a functioning labor market or work environment. The law further provides "all employers of labor in public organizations shall, as much as possible, have persons with disabilities constituting at least 5 percent of their employment."

The government did not effectively enforce laws against discrimination. Penalties were not commensurate with those for similar violations. Penalties were rarely applied against violators.

NGOs expressed concern regarding discrimination against women in the private sector, particularly in access to employment, promotion to higher professional positions, and salary equity. According to reports many businesses implemented a “get pregnant, get fired” policy. Government and private research studies found more than 60 percent of employees experienced one or more instances of sexual harassment. In one 2021 survey, 64 percent of employees reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. Of those reporting harassment, 85 percent were women. Women remained underrepresented in the formal sector where labor protections and higher wages applied. Women did not receive equal pay for equal work and often encountered difficulty in acquiring commercial credit or obtaining tax deductions or rebates as heads of households. Unmarried women endured many forms of discrimination. Several states had laws mandating equal opportunity for women.

Employers frequently discriminated against persons with HIV and AIDS. The government spoke out in opposition to such discrimination, calling it a violation of the fundamental right to work (see also section 6).

Significant gender pay gaps existed. The National Bureau of Statistics reported more than 65 percent of senior positions were held by men. Some research indicated patterns of discrimination pushed women into lower-paying jobs in sectors such as clerical work, sales, health care, social care, and education.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

Wage and Hour Laws: The law provides for a national minimum wage for public and private sector employers with 25 or more full-time employees, with exceptions for seasonal agricultural workers and some others. The minimum wage was not higher than the poverty income level. Employers with fewer than 25 employees are exempt from the minimum wage, and most workers were not covered. Some states declined to implement the minimum wage law, citing financial constraints. The ILO urged the government to consult with employers and worker groups regarding extending the minimum wage coverage to excluded categories of workers.

The law mandates a 40-hour workweek, two to four weeks of annual leave, and overtime and holiday pay, except for agricultural and domestic workers. The law does not define premium pay or overtime. The law prohibits excessive compulsory overtime for civilian government employees.

Occupational Safety and Health: The law establishes appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) standards for the main industries in the country. OSH experts did not actively identify unsafe conditions and there were insufficient OSH inspectors to respond to workers’ OSH complaints. The law requires employers to compensate injured workers and dependent survivors of workers killed in industrial accidents. The law provides for the protection of factory employees in hazardous situations. The law does not provide other nonfactory workers with similar protections. The law applies to legal foreign workers, but not all companies respected these laws. By law workers may remove themselves from situations endangering health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, but authorities did not effectively protect employees in these situations.

There were multiple reports of major industrial accidents in the petroleum sector. In February, floating oil storage vessel *Trinity Spirit* exploded off the coast of Delta State, killing at least five persons. In April, an explosion at an illegal oil refinery on the border of Rivers State and Imo State killed at least 100 persons. In July, a crude oil and chemical storage facility exploded in Delta State. Five persons were reported killed.

Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement: The Ministry of Labor and Employment is responsible for enforcement of wage, hour, and OSH laws, but the number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance. Although the law gives labor inspectors authority to make unannounced visits and initiate sanctions, it stipulates most individuals must initiate their own complaint before the National Industrial Court of Nigeria (NICN) in order to report noncompliance and seek redress. Government enforcement of the minimum wage, particularly by state governments, remained sporadic. The ILO urged the government to establish an effective system of supervision and sanctions to apply the national minimum wage at all levels.

Penalties were low and not commensurate with other crimes, such as fraud. Penalties were rarely applied. For example, the fine for employers found failing to pay minimum wage could not exceed 5 percent of the monthly wage. Because the law requires most individuals to bring their own cases against employers, and small businesses with fewer than 25 employees are exempt from the minimum wage laws, most if not all cases involved higher wage or salaried employees who were working in the formal sector.

Informal Sector: Approximately 70 to 80 percent of the country's working population worked in the informal economy. The informal sector consisted mainly of small-scale, largely self-employed activities such as retail trade; transport, restaurant, and repair services; financial services; domestic work; personal services; farming; mining; quarrying; sewing; attending traditional births; and acting as herbalists and other traditional medical practitioners. Relatively profitable informal work could be found in the financial sector, with private money lenders, currency exchangers, and informal finance associations operating irregular and shadow-banking enterprises.

Authorities did not enforce wage, hour, and OSH laws and inspections in the informal sector or with part-time workers. Most informal workers did not bring cases to the NICN due to lack of resources. The country allows informal workers to join its National Health Insurance Scheme by paying voluntary contributions, but less than 5 percent of the population subscribed. The government did not provide social protections for workplace injury or sickness for informal sector workers or self-employed workers. Small businesses with more than three employees, and some individual workers, could join voluntary contribution programs with the national pension for old age and survivor benefit, sickness, and maternity coverage, but they rarely enrolled.

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