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Recent Developments

As Nigeria gears up for general elections in 2027, attention has focused on an amendment to the Electoral Act, which governs all national and state elections conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Leading CSOs that focus on the electoral process campaigned for the amendment, which makes the electronic transmission of results mandatory and the basis on which INEC compiles the election results. When the National Assembly considered--and eventually rejected--the proposal, protesters gathered at the National Assembly. The Bill, however, was later signed into law in February 2026 by President Tinubu, who apologized for excessive use of force against the protesters at the National Assembly.

While we aim to maintain information that is as current as possible, we realize that situations can rapidly change. If you are aware of any additional information or inaccuracies on this page, please keep us informed; write to ICNL at ngomonitor@icnl.org.

Introduction

Nigeria is home to a vibrant and diverse civil society sector, ranging from local elites' clubs, traditional age-class associations, and village unions to national organizations with thousands of members. While some civil society organizations (CSOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) predate Nigeria's creation in 1914 or emerged in the years leading up to independence in October 1960, many more have been established in the decades since.

As a former British colony, Nigeria's legal system follows the common law tradition but also accommodates indigenous customary and Shari'a (Islamic) law. While customary and Shari'a law were historically limited to civil matters with the consent of all parties, since 1999 several northern states have expanded Shari'a to criminal matters and social interaction.

The legal environment for civil society in Nigeria is generally supportive. The Constitution guarantees freedom of association, allowing individuals to come together for any lawful purpose. Organizations seeking legal personality or tax benefits must register under the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA), Cap. C20, Laws of the Federation of Nigeria 2004.

Despite this vibrancy and generally enabling legal environment, civil society faces significant obstacles. Widespread insecurity persists, driven by terrorism, insurgency, banditry, and mass kidnappings, especially in the northern states. Although the penchant of officials to label CSOs critical of the government as foreign-sponsored and unpatriotic has diminished, selective enforcement of laws and arbitrary restrictions on protests and expression still also continue to present challenges.

As Nigeria gears up for general elections in 2027, there has been a steady stream of defections of State Governors and other leading politicians to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) so that APC, which had 20 Governors after the 2023 elections, now has 30 out of 36 State Governors. This has raised fears of one-party dominance. Arrests and criminal charges against leading opposition members, with three former governors facing charges, have added weight to claims that the defections to the ruling party are

due to threats and intimidation, rather than genuine political beliefs.

Civic Freedoms at a Glance

Organizational Forms	Civil society organizations (CSOs)
Registration Body	Corporate Affairs Commission
Approximate Number	Digitization has improved record-keeping, while decentralization has improved access for those searching for information on individual companies.
Barriers to Formation	1. Minors, persons of unsound mind, undischarged bankrupts, and those convicted within the previous 5 years of an offence involving dishonesty cannot be registered as trustees or directors. 2. The President may issue an order to prohibit a CSO that is “dangerous to the good government of Nigeria or of any part thereof.” The Corporate Affairs Commission has stated that henceforth, registration by socio-cultural groups and organisations would not be granted without a certificate of security screening and clearance of their Board of Trustees members. 3. Both Nigerian and foreign CSOs seeking incorporation may face hurdles in the form of various requirements. 4. Ban on the registration of gay clubs, societies or organizations.
Barriers to Operations	1. If a CSO wishes to engage in activity that involves a government Ministry, Department, or Agency (MDA), it may need to satisfy the criteria of that MDA. 2. Some GONGOs are perceived as undermining independent CSOs. 3. Certain state governments have sought to pressure and even subvert CSOs. 4. Ban on the registration of gay clubs, societies or organizations. 5. President has the power to prohibit groups even if they are unregistered.
Barriers to Resources	None
Barriers to Expression	The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act of 2014 not only makes same sex marriage illegal, but it also provides that: “Any person or group of persons that ... supports the registration, operation, and sustenance of gay clubs, societies, organizations, processions or meetings in Nigeria commits an offence ...” Bloggers and journalists who are critical of the country’s leaders, particularly at the State level, face increasing pressure, arrest, beatings, and threats to stop reporting, while the government has also resorted to treason-related charges where demonstrators call for the removal or resignation of elected leaders.
Barriers to Assembly	Failure to provide protection for and excessive use of force on protests that oppose government policies and excessive government control over the route and time of protests.

Legal Overview

This section provides a brief overview of Nigeria's legal framework for the promotion and protection of civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

RATIFICATION OF INTERNATIONAL AGREEMENTS

Key International Agreements	Ratification*
International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR)	1993
Optional Protocol to ICCPR (ICCPR-OP1)	No
International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (ICESCR)	1993
Optional Protocol to ICESCR (Op-ICESCR)	No
International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)	1967
Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)	1984
Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women	2004
Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	1991
International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW)	No
Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)	2010

Key Regional Agreements	Ratification
Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)	1975
ECOWAS Supplemental Protocol	2005

* Category includes ratification, accession, or succession to the treaty

CONSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

The current Constitution of Nigeria came into force on May 29, 1999 and has been amended (altered) four times as follows:

1. May 2010: [First Constitution Alteration Act](#) (mostly election-related changes)
2. May 2010: [Second Constitution Alteration Act](#) (further election-related changes)
3. February 2011 ([National Industrial Court of Nigeria](#))
4. May 2018: Fourth Constitution Alteration Act (several changes, including reduction in age limits for standing for election, time limits for election petitions, term limits for Vice President/Deputy

Governor who completes a principal's term, and financial autonomy for state legislatures and state judiciary)

The 5th Constitution Alteration Act was signed into law on April 14, 2023. No changes relevant to NGOs, civil society or the freedom of assembly and freedom of speech were made to the Constitution at that time.

Chapter IV of the Constitution enshrines fundamental rights, including the freedoms of association and assembly. Section 39 guarantees the right to receive and impart information. Section 40 guarantees the right to peaceful assembly and association. Section 45 permits these rights to be restricted in the interests of defence, public safety, public order, public morality or public health, or to protect the rights or freedoms of others.

Sections 39 and 40 provide as follows:

Section 39:

1. Every person shall be entitled to freedom of expression, including freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart ideas and information without interference.
2. Without prejudice to the generality of subsection (1) of this section, every person shall be entitled to own, establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of information, ideas and opinions; Provided that no person, other than the Government of the Federation or of a State or any other person or body authorised by the President on the fulfilment of conditions laid down by an Act of the National Assembly, shall own, establish or operate a television or wireless broadcasting station for, any purpose whatsoever.
3. Nothing in this section shall invalidate any law that is reasonably justifiable in a democratic society:
 - (a) for the purpose of preventing the disclosure of information received in confidence, maintaining the authority and independence of courts or regulating telephony, wireless broadcasting, television or the exhibition of cinematograph films; or
 - (b) imposing restrictions upon persons holding office under the Government of the Federation or of a State, members of the armed forces of the Federation or members of the Nigeria Police Force or other Government security services or agencies established by law.

Section 40:

Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely and associate with other persons, and in particular he may form or belong to any political party, trade union or any other association for the protection of his interests:

Provided that the provisions of this section shall not derogate from the powers conferred by this Constitution on the Independent National Electoral Commission with respect to political parties to which that Commission does not accord recognition.

NATIONAL LAWS, POLICIES, AND REGULATIONS

Nigeria is a federal republic and the main laws that govern civil society are derived from federal legislation, including the following:

- [Companies and Allied Matters Act 2020](#);
- [Companies Income Tax Act \(CITA\) 2006](#);

- Taxes and Levies (Approved List for Collection) Act 1998;
- [Value Added Tax Act 1993](#);
- [VAT Amendment Act 2007](#);
- [Federal Inland Revenue Service \(Establishment\) Act 2007](#);
- [National Planning Commission Act 2013](#);
- [Money Laundering \(Prevention & Prohibition\) Act 2022](#);
- [Terrorism \(Prevention\) Act 2011](#);
- [Cybercrimes \(Amendment\) Act 2024](#);
- [Data Protection Act 2023](#);
- [The Code of Practice for Interactive Computer Service Platforms/Internet Intermediaries 2023](#);
- Nigeria Tax Act 2025;
- Nigeria Tax Administration Act;
- Code of Practice for Interactive Computer Service Platforms and Internet Intermediaries (CoP for ICSP/II), issued by the National Information Technology Development Agency (NITDA).

While criminal offences may be created by federal legislation, most criminal laws are state laws which derive from the Penal Code (originally applicable in 19 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory) and the Criminal Code (originally applicable in 17 southern states).

PENDING REGULATORY INITIATIVES

The following bills are pending:

- National Broadcasting Commission Act Amendment bill
- [National Information Technology Development Agency's Practice Code](#)
- [Nigerian Press Council Act Amendment Bill](#) (the ECOWAS Court has [ordered](#) that the Nigerian Press Council Act of 1992 to be amended)

Legal Analysis

This section provides an in-depth assessment of Nigeria's legal environment for civic freedoms, including the barriers to the exercise of the freedoms of association (formation, operations, resources), expression, and peaceful assembly. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

ORGANIZATIONAL FORMS

Individuals can form a wide range of CSOs in Nigeria simply by coming together for any lawful collective purpose. Potential organizational forms include companies limited by guarantee, associations with incorporated trustees, unincorporated associations, co-operatives, and traditional organizations akin to

friendship societies, such as town unions and other mutual benefit groups.

For CSOs seeking legal entity status, the two most common options are registration as an association with incorporated trustees or incorporation as a company limited by guarantee. Both forms are governed by the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) and administered by the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC).

A *company limited by guarantee* is formed to promote commerce, art, science, religion, sports, culture, education, research, charity, or other similar purposes. Its income and property must be applied exclusively towards the promotion of its purposes.

An *association with incorporated trustees* is an association of persons that appoints one or more trustees and pursues registration under Part C of the CAMA. There are two types of associations with incorporated trustees. The first type occurs where trustees are appointed by a community bound by customs, religion, kinship, or nationality. The second type arises where trustees are appointed by a body or association established for religious, educational, literary, scientific, social, development, cultural, sporting, or charitable purposes.

PUBLIC BENEFIT STATUS

Under the Companies Income Tax Act (CITA), companies engaged in ecclesiastical, charitable, or educational activities of a public character, as well as those promoting sporting activities, are exempt from income tax on their profits. Not-for-profit companies engaged in other activities may apply to the President of Nigeria for an order granting them tax exemption on their income or profits, regardless of the source.

Incorporated Nigerian companies that donate to CSOs engaged in ecclesiastical, charitable, or educational activities of a public character, or to any of the bodies listed in the Fifth Schedule of CITA, are eligible for tax relief on donations of up to 10 percent of their profits. Individuals, however, do not receive any tax benefits for donations to CSOs.

Under the tax reform legislation, including the Nigerian Tax Act, 2025 and Nigerian Tax Administration Act, 2025, which came into effect on January 1, 2026, the income tax exemption enjoyed by not-for-profit organisations is limited to income not derived from commercial or unrelated business activities. Not-for-Profit organisations must maintain clear and transparent records with detailed accounts showing how income and donations are received and applied. Their annual returns and reports must show that funds are used exclusively for charitable purposes

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The National Assembly may establish various committees (standing, *ad hoc*, joint, or “of the whole house”) and develop rules for public hearings on legislation that has passed a second reading. The Environmental Impact Assessment Act of 1992 similarly requires the establishment of review panels to hold public hearings on projects.

In practice, however, the National Assembly makes limited effort to involve the public, partly due to concerns that CSOs could mobilize public opinion and criticize the legislature. State legislatures have similar powers, but provisions for public consultation are rarely activated, except in a handful of prominent states where civil society oversight is stronger.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on “community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion.” However, “sex” has not been interpreted to include transgender or other gender identifies, and Nigeria’s anti-LGBTQ law bans CSOs focused on LGBTQ rights. Legislation exists to protect the rights of persons with disabilities at the federal level and in some states. “Federal character” provisions in the Constitution are designed to prevent any group from monopolizing power or access to public resources. There are no specific laws addressing age discrimination, and constitutional amendments have lowered the age at which Nigerians may stand for election.

Public advocacy on climate and environmental matters takes place, but generally yields limited results. Communities affected by oil exploration in the south, for instance, have engaged in decades-long campaigns over pollution, yet these efforts have been slow to elicit government action. Similarly, communities in the north impacted by practices such as cyanide use in gold mining often lack the capacity for sustained advocacy or civic participation due to low levels of literacy and education.

BARRIERS TO FORMATION

There are several legal and practical barriers to the formation of CSOs in Nigeria.

Potential Founders, Trustees, Directors

At least two individuals over the age of 18 are required to form a company, although minors may join in formation. However, certain individuals are barred from serving as trustees or directors, including minors, persons of unsound mind, people with undischarged bankruptcies, and those convicted within the past five years of offenses involving dishonesty.

CSO trustees must register with the Financial Reporting Council of Nigeria, pay a registration fee, and renew their registration annually.

Presidential Power to Prohibit Organizations

Although Nigerian law does not ban the formation or operation of unregistered groups, the President may issue an order declaring a CSO that is “dangerous to the good government of Nigeria or of any part thereof” to be unlawful, thus prohibiting its operations. Although few organizations have been refused registration because of such an order, this power has been used against unregistered organizations. For example, the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), a non-violent group advocating for succession, was proscribed by the Obasanjo administration. Boko Haram, a violent extremist Islamist group, has also been banned. Peaceful Islamist groups have at times been subjected to police raids and arrests after being wrongly labeled as Boko Haram affiliates.

Registration Procedures

Both Nigerian and foreign CSOs seeking incorporation under the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) may face procedural hurdles, including:

- A CSO seeking to incorporate as a company limited by guarantee must have its structure approved by the Federal Government. There is no specific procedure for securing such approval, but applications are handled by the Attorney-General of the Federation. CSOs undergoing this process may be required to adjust their governance structures. For example, a CSO with educational objectives might be required to include someone with a background in education on its board. Generally, however, CSOs are more likely to experience difficulties with administrative bottlenecks or inefficiency than attempts at political control.
- A CSO can challenge any refusal to make a decision on its application for registration by applying for an order of *mandamus* to compel the Corporate Affairs Commission (CAC) to make a decision. However, there is no fixed time for deciding on an application.
- Associations with incorporated trustees must publish any changes to their trustees or constitution in newspapers with an unspecified waiting period before any changes can take effect. Any member of the public can object to the proposed change or to the CSO’s original incorporation. While CSOs can contest such objections, the process often results in delays.
- CAMA permits police background checks on a CSO’s proposed trustees, though these powers are rarely exercised in the case of incorporated trustees.
- Registration fees are set in subsidiary regulations under CAMA. Registering incorporated trustees

costs N21,000 (US\$150), while registering a company with a nominal share capital under N1 million costs N10,000 (US\$75). While these fees are relatively modest, not-for-profit organizations are not eligible for any waivers or reduced fees and must also pay stamp duties on their registration or incorporation documents.

Foreign Organizations

Foreign CSOs may incorporate under CAMA but are subject to the same requirements as local organizations. This means they are prohibited from having names that may be acceptable in their home countries but that could be interpreted in Nigeria to refer to a government body (thus “national” in the name of a foreign CSO could be considered problematic).

Alternatively, foreign CSOs unable to incorporate under CAMA may still operate in Nigeria by registering with the National Planning Commission through a bilateral agreement with the Ministry. This status confers legal personality but entails significant government oversight. For example, the Ministry may appoint members to its board, approve the hiring of its key personnel, and approve its budget because the foreign CSO effectively operates as a quasi-consultant to the Ministry.

LGBTQ Organizations

The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act, signed into law by President Jonathan in January 2014, explicitly bans the registration of LGBTQ clubs, societies, and organizations. This law reinforced existing prohibitions on forming groups for unlawful purposes, as same-sex relations were already criminalized under the Nigerian Criminal Code.

BARRIERS TO OPERATIONS

Additional Registration or Certification Requirements

CSOs wishing to engage in activity involving government ministries, departments, or agencies (MDAs) may need to meet specific criteria set by those bodies. For example, CSOs wishing to observe elections may want to register with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). While refusal by INEC does not prevent a CSO from continuing to operate or its members from observing elections (if done in line with general rules of election observation), accredited organizations typically receive identification allowing them access to restricted areas, such as collation centers. Similarly, CSOs providing developmental support—such as digging boreholes for water or offering educational assistance—may seek registration with relevant state or federal MDAs, at least to ease communication and coordination. However, many CSOs carry out such activities without seeking to be placed on any “approved list.”

This form of registration should not be confused with incorporation by the CAC, which confers legal personality. In some cases, the CAC requires prospective associations to obtain prior certification from a particular ministry or department, depending on their objectives.

Reporting Requirements

Following amendments to the Money Laundering (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022 and the Terrorism (Prevention and Prohibition) Act 2022, not-for-profit organizations are no longer classified as “designated non-financial institutions.” As a result, they are now exempt from the onerous paperwork and reporting obligations previously imposed to combat money laundering.

However, many CSOs continue to register with and obtain a certificate from the Special Control Unit Against Money Laundering (SCUML). Regardless of registration status, they must file a Currency Transaction Report (CTR) for transactions exceeding NGN 10,000,000 (USD 6,500 as of September 2025) for corporate bodies and NGN 5,000,000 (USD 3,300) for individuals, as well as submit a Suspicious Transaction Report (STR) for any transaction deemed “suspicious.” These reporting requirements can be burdensome for CSOs.

GONGOS

The government has established its own NGOs, known as GONGOS. For example, during the 2007 elections, several election-observation organizations were created and accredited by INEC, a move perceived as an attempt to dilute and overshadow statements issued by independent CSOs that were critical of the conduct of the elections. Since 2015, when the Buhari administration came to power, the number of pro-government NGOs [appears](#) to have increased significantly.

Harassment

At the federal level, CSOs have generally not faced systematic harassment. However, some state governments have sought to pressure or subvert CSOs, subjecting certain organizations to targeted adverse treatment. In such cases, CSOs retain the right to challenge government actions in court.

Police have occasionally invoked colonial-era laws to restrict the rights of Nigerians to hold public meetings, but these measures often fail when tested against constitutional guarantees of freedom of association and assembly.

Prohibition on LGBTQ Clubs, Societies, and Meetings

The Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act, signed into law by President Goodluck Jonathan in January 2014, bans same-sex marriages and civil unions and prohibits the registration of LGBTQ clubs, societies, and organizations in Nigeria. It also criminalizes their “sustenance, processions and meetings.” While CSOs are not required to register, the President retains the authority to declare both registered and unregistered organizations unlawful. The Act appears to prohibit LGBTQ clubs and organizations outright, though its compatibility with constitutional protections for freedom of assembly and association has not yet been tested in court. (See also discussion of the Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2014 in the Barriers to Expression section below in this report).

Case of Borno State and Boko Haram

Since 2015, military operations have weakened Boko Haram. Concerns have arisen that some Boko Haram members are attempting to blend into local populations, infiltrating villages and even internally displaced persons (IDP) camps in Borno State, the heart of the insurgency. Meanwhile, the government has faced criticism over reports of starvation and the misappropriation of aid for IDPs.

Governor Shettima of Borno State accused the United Nations (UN) and international CSOs of profiting from the crisis, spending more on themselves and armored vehicles than on aid for IDPs. Following international backlash, he claimed his criticism was directed at local CSOs, even though no local CSOs working in Borno State have funds for armored vehicles.

In response to these claims, the Borno State Government has required all local CSOs to register and obtain accreditation, regardless of whether they work with IDPs. Initially, CSOs were required to collect a 15-page registration form, which required nearly 70 supporting documents, from the State Government House. Though requirements have since been revised, the process remains unsettled. At first, unregistered CSOs were barred from entering IDP camps or hosting workshops. Although this stance has also been modified, the Department of State Security (DSS) has disrupted some CSO activities on the grounds that they have not been authorized. Additionally, there have been more frequent immigrations checks on CSO staff by the Nigerian Immigration Service.

BARRIERS TO RESOURCES

There are no significant legal barriers to CSOs’ access to resources under Nigerian law. A CSO may engage in business activities, but if it is incorporated with trustees or as a company limited by guarantee, the proceeds must be applied exclusively to the organization’s stated purposes. Registered CSOs are also free to compete for government funding, provided this aligns with their objectives.

There are no restrictions on CSOs receiving foreign funding. However, while the Nigerian government

itself benefits from foreign aid, it often criticizes CSOs for being “sponsored” by foreign interests. Such criticism carries the implication that these organizations are unpatriotic and use foreign support to undermine national interests by opposing government policies.

Nigerian citizens currently receive no tax benefits for donations to CSOs. Introducing such incentives could strengthen the sector by encouraging domestic philanthropy.

BARRIERS TO EXPRESSION

Legal entities registered under the Companies and Allied Matters Act (CAMA) are prohibited from making donations or gifts to political parties or “for any political purpose” (Section 43(2) of CAMA). Violating this prohibition can result in officers and any members of the company who voted for such a donation being held liable to refund the amount to the company, as well as facing conviction and fines equal to the value of the gift. These restrictions have not affected human rights and pro-democracy CSOs, as they are interpreted to apply to partisan politics, registered political parties, and candidates for elective office.

The Same Sex Marriage (Prohibition) Act 2014 does not bar advocacy for changes to the law on homosexuality but makes it a criminal offense to “support the registration, operation, and sustenance of LGBTQ clubs, societies, organizations, processions or meetings in Nigeria.” Although enforcement was vigorous at first, government action under the Act has since waned. A constitutional challenge to the Act was dismissed by the Federal High Court in Abuja in 2014 on procedural grounds for lack of standing.

Since 2016, bloggers, journalists, and civil society actors have come under increasing pressure in Nigeria. Centre for Information Technology and Development (CITAD) head, Ali Sabo, for example, stated in 2025 that state governments were “increasingly tolerating, and in some cases enabling, violations of citizens’ digital freedoms” and that “several cases of arrests, detention and harassment of citizens for expressing opinions online have been recorded across Kano, Jigawa, Niger, Katsina and Kwara states.... Citizens are being arrested and detained simply for criticizing public officials online. This reflects a growing culture of intolerance, abuse of power and the weaponisation of law enforcement agencies at the grassroots.” Examples have included:

- In 2017, two journalists were beaten and told to never write anything against the Ebonyi State government.
- In 2019, journalist Agba Jalingo was detained by the police for over a week after reporting on an alleged diversion of N500 million by the Cross River governor. He was later charged with treason.
- In 2024, during a dispute with senior lawyer Afe Babalola, author Dele Farotimi was arrested over alleged criminal libel in his book *Nigeria and its Criminal Justice System*. When it emerged that criminal libel was no longer an offense, authorities brought charges under the Cybercrimes Act.
- A five-day internet disruption in August 2024 coincided with the #EndBadGovernance protests. Civil society groups alleged that the blackout was intentional.
- Hamdiyya Sharif, a teenager who criticized the Sokoto State Government for failing to protect citizens against bandits, was harassed and disappeared in November 2024 before resurfacing in Zamfara State.
- In March 2025, blogger Ismail Awuali was detained in Kano State for “defaming” a state commissioner.
- In April 2025, the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) directed radio and television stations not to air *Tell Your Papa*, a song by rapper Eedris Abdulkareem, labeling it “objectionable.” The controversial song calls on the son of President Bola Tinubu to confront his father over the worsening socio-economic conditions in the country.

- In May 2025, the Kano State Government banned live political interviews and prohibited journalists from asking “provocative” questions during media briefings.
- In August 2025, Omoyele Sowore, presidential candidate of the African Action Congress, was detained and beaten by the Nigeria Police Force’s Monitoring Unit during an investigation into alleged forgery, cyberbullying, and criminal defamation—charges reportedly linked to his public criticism of Inspector-General of Police Kayode Egbetokun. Four months later, in December 2025, Sowore was arraigned before the Federal High Court in Abuja for alleged cybercrimes, with the court barring him from making further “statements that are detrimental to the peace and security of the country.”
- Also in August 2025, Niger State Governor Umaru Bago accused the privately owned Badeggi Radio Station of inciting the public against the state government and ordered the immediate revocation of its operational license, even though only the Nigeria Broadcasting Commission has the authority to revoke broadcasting licenses.

Although many of these instances originate from actions or complaints from State Governments or even private individuals, the enforcement depends on the security agencies – principally the Nigeria Police Force – which are controlled by the Federal Government.

In addition, there are concerns that the Cybercrimes Act may continue to pose threats to freedom of speech, including through criminal investigations, arrests, or prosecutions arising from casual conversation, criticism, or insults expressed on social media. Illustrative cases include the following:

- Actress Angela Okorie called another person “a blood sucking demon” on social media and was then arrested and arraigned on a seven-count charge of conspiracy to commit cyberstalking and defamation. The charge was, however, dropped by the Nigeria Police in April 2026.
- Justice Chidiebere was arrested in May 2026 after honoring an invitation from the Nigerian Army to discuss videos he had posted about the poor conditions of Nigerian soldiers. He was later granted bail in a cybercrime trial.
- In another case in May 2026, nursing student Joy Ezeugwu was arrested over a social media post exposing unsatisfactory living conditions at her former college.

BARRIERS TO ASSEMBLY

Section 40 of the Nigerian Constitution protects the freedom of assembly, stating that “Every person shall be entitled to assemble freely.” This right is regulated by the Public Order Act, which has been in force since 1990 and has been the subject of significant litigation.

In 2007, the Court of Appeal struck down several provisions of the Act in *All Nigeria Peoples Party v. Inspector-General of Police*. The Court’s decision, however, has not yet been reflected in legislative changes nearly 20 years later.

Notification

Among the provisions of the Public Order Act invalidated by the Court of Appeal in 2007 was one requiring advance police notification. In its ruling, the court emphasized that the Act should complement, not undermine, constitutional freedoms. Adekeye JCA noted:

“A rally or placard carrying demonstration has become a form of expression of views on current issues affecting government and the governed in a sovereign state... it will not only be primitive but also retrogressive if Nigeria continues to require a pass to hold a rally.”

Mohammed JCA concurred:

“In present day Nigeria, clearly a Police Permit has outlived its usefulness. Certainly in a democracy, it is the right of citizens to conduct peaceful processions, rallies or demonstrations without seeking and obtaining permission from anybody. It is a right guaranteed by the 1999 Constitution and any law that attempts to curtail such right is null and void and of no consequence.”

As a result, organizers are no longer required to notify the police in advance, though many continue to do so voluntarily to arrange security.

Time, Place and Manner Restrictions

The surviving portion of Section 1 of the Public Order Act allows state governors to prescribe the route and timing of processions.

Section 7 prohibits the wearing of any uniform deemed offensive or likely to provoke a breach of the peace, as determined by the state Commissioner of Police.

Enforcement Challenges

In practice, the authorities have often used force to disperse peaceful assemblies, with decisions about which gatherings to permit appearing arbitrary and influenced by political considerations. The Nigeria Police Force, although ostensibly a national institution, is ultimately accountable to the president, making it more likely to act in line with the administration’s interests.

For example, in January 2010, protests calling for a formal handover of power to then Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan were well policed. In contrast, in January 2012, protests against fuel price hikes organized under the #OccupyNigeria banner were initially tolerated but later violently dispersed by security forces. Authorities cited intelligence reports suggesting Boko Haram planned to exploit the demonstrations to foment trouble.

Problems with enforcement and violations of assembly rights persisted in subsequent years:

- In 2015, following clashes between the Nigerian Army and the Shiite group Islamic Movement in Nigeria, which led to as many as 700 civilian deaths, several governors in the northern part of the country banned protests.
- In 2015, pro-Biafra marches were banned in Rivers State, while protests ahead of gubernatorial elections in Bayelsa State were also blocked.
- In January 2017, police broke up a protest in favor of U.S. President Donald Trump by the Independent Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), killing at least one protester.

#EndBadGovernance and Electoral Act Protests

The Bola Tinubu administration’s economic reforms—including the already-scheduled ending of a fuel subsidy and the collapse of the Nigerian currency—triggered widespread hardship. In response, in August 2024, CSOs called for #EndBadGovernance protests, also known as the ‘Days of Rage’ and ‘Hunger Protests.’ The widespread protests began peacefully but escalated as security forces attempted to contain or disperse crowds and as some protesters blocked major roads and looted and destroyed both government and private property. On the first day alone, at least 21 protesters were killed and over 1,000 arrested. Curfews were also imposed in several states. Notably, protesters in Kano and Katsina states waving Russian flags were arrested and charged with treason. Authorities argued that the flags were a coded call for a military coup in Nigeria, noting that the neighboring states of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger had recently experienced military coups.

As Nigeria gears up for general elections in 2027, attention has focused on an amendment to the

Electoral Act, which governs all national and state elections conducted by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Leading CSOs that focus on the electoral process campaigned for an amendment to make the electronic transmission of results mandatory and the basis on which INEC will compile the results of the election. When the National Assembly considered (and eventually rejected) the proposal, protesters gathered at the National Assembly and were tear-gassed. After the Bill was later signed into law by President Tinubu in February 2026, Tinubu apologized for the excessive use of force against them.

Additional Resources

This section contains links to external reports and news reports relevant to civic freedoms. Click a subheading for more, or [click here to expand all subheadings](#).

GLOBAL INDEX RANKINGS

Ranking Body	Rank	Ranking Scale (best - worst possible)
UN Human Development Index	164 (2023)	1 - 193
World Justice Project Rule of Law Index	120 (2024)	1 - 142
Fund for Peace: Fragile States Index	15 (2024)	179 - 1
Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index	142 (2025)	1 - 182
Freedom House: Freedom in the World	Status: Partly Free Political Rights: 20 Civil Liberties: 24 (2025)	Free/Partly Free/Not Free 40 - 0 60 - 0

REPORTS

UN Universal Periodic Review Reports	Nigeria UPR page
UN Human Rights Reports	• Nigeria OHCHR page • Report of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General on human rights defenders (2006) • Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment (2007) • Report of the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions (2021)
UNCA Civil Society Coalition	Civil Society Report on the Implementation of chapter II & Chapter V of the CNUCC in Nigeria (2024)
U.S. State Department	2024 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Nigeria

Fragile States Index Reports	Nigeria
Human Rights Watch	2025 World Report
IMF Country Reports	Nigeria and the IMF
International Journal of Advanced Research in Public Policy	Civil Society and Federalism in Nigeria (2017)
ICNL Online Library	Nigeria

NEWS

[Court orders SERAP to pay DSS officials N100m](#) (May 2026)

The Federal Capital Territory High Court in Maitama, Abuja, ordered the Socio-Economic Rights and Accountability Project to pay N100m in damages to two officials of the Department of State Services over a defamatory publication on X. Justice Yusuf Halilu, who delivered judgment in the suit marked FCT/HC/CV/4547/24, held that the claimants, DSS officials Sarah John and Gabriel Ogundele, successfully proved that SERAP's publication on its official X handle was defamatory. SERAP had, in a series of posts published on its X handle on September 9, 2024, alleged that officers of the State Security Service unlawfully occupied its office and demanded to see its directors.

[NBC threatens sanctions over declining standards in news, political broadcasting](#) (April 2026)

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has issued a formal notice to broadcast stations across Nigeria, warning of stricter enforcement of the Nigeria Broadcasting Code following what it described as a sustained rise in ethical and professional breaches, particularly in news, current affairs, and political programming. In a statement, the commission said it had observed a troubling pattern in which broadcast platforms are increasingly being used in ways that undermine their core responsibility to inform the public with "accuracy, balance, and professionalism."

[Court affirms citizen's right to film officers in public](#) (March 2026)

A Federal High Court sitting in Warri, Delta State, has affirmed the constitutional rights of Nigerians to record police officers conducting stop-and-search operations in public spaces. Justice Hyeladzira Nganjiwa gave the pronouncement while delivering judgement in an enforcement of a fundamental rights suit marked FHC/WR/CS/87/2025, filed by a lawyer, Maxwell Nosakhare Uwaifo. The judge also maintained that "police officers must wear visible name tags, display their force numbers, and refrain from harassing, intimidating, arresting, or confiscating devices from citizens who record their actions". Uwaifo had filed the suit following an encounter with police officers along the Sapele Roundabout while travelling from Benin to Warri on May 10, 2025.

[Reps apologise to protesters affected by tear gas](#) (February 2026)

The House of Representatives apologized to protesters affected by the firing of tear gas at the National Assembly, describing the incident as regrettable and assuring that the circumstances surrounding it were being reviewed. The apology was delivered by the House Spokesman, Akin Rotimi, at a press conference held to review the Electoral Act signed into law by President Bola Tinubu. The Nigerian Police had come under heavy criticism after operatives openly fired tear gas at demonstrators who returned to the National Assembly complex.

[Protesters storm N'Assembly as debate on Electoral Act resumes](#) (February 2026)

The National Assembly reconvenes to debate the Electoral Act amid renewed protests over reforms seen as critical to the credibility of the 2027 general elections. The two chambers are meeting to resolve their differences over the electronic transmission of polling unit results, with attention focused on whether the House of Representatives' position will stand or be modified in line with the Senate's conditional clause. They will also seek to resolve the controversy surrounding the 2027 general election timetable released

by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). Meanwhile, the Movement for Credible Elections (MCE), a coalition of civil society and labour leaders, has announced plans to stage a peaceful protest at the Assembly today to push for comprehensive electoral reforms ahead of the 2027 general elections.

DSS Arraigns Sowore on alleged Cybercrime Offences (December 2025)

The Department of State Services (DSS) arraigned a politician and online publisher, Omoyele Sowore, before a Federal High Court in Abuja, for alleged cybercrimes, with the court barring him from further making statements that are detrimental to the peace and security of the country. Justice Mohammed Umar, in a ruling, threatened to revoke the bail granted Sowore should he ever make such statements. However, Justice Umar held that since there was evidence that Sowore was a presidential candidate in the country before and having also earlier been granted bail by the court, with his international passport still being held by the court, he was entitled to be granted bail on self-recognition.

Tinubu Urges Editors to Criticize Boldly, But Build the Nation (November 2025)

President Bola Ahmed Tinubu urged Nigerian editors to uphold truth, fairness, and national interest in reporting, stressing that democracy thrives on responsible public discourse. He made the remarks while declaring open the 21st All-Nigeria Editors' Conference in Abuja. Recalling the fierce media criticism over early economic reforms, such as fuel subsidy removal and exchange rate unification, Tinubu said the steps were necessary to rescue the economy from inefficiency and corruption.

Nigeria needs collaboration, not confrontation, CSO tells Trump (November 2025)

Hope Alive Initiative (HAI) has urged US President Donald Trump to collaborate with Nigeria to solve its security crisis rather than adopt a confrontational approach. In a statement, HAI's director of media and communications said the threat of military intervention undermines Nigeria's sovereignty and diplomatic efforts to address its complex security issues effectively. The group acknowledged that the activities of extremist groups have resulted in the tragic loss of lives but insisted that the outcome is better classified "as a manifestation of a complex and multi-dimensional crisis that affects every Nigerian irrespective of faith". The civil society group asked the US, the United Kingdom, China, the European Union, the African Union and the ECOWAS to support Nigeria to defeat insecurity.

EndSARS memorial: Security officers harass activist at Lekki Toll Gate (October 2025)

Nigerian activist and Executive Director of the Enough is Enough (EiE) Nigeria group, Yemi Adamolekun, was reportedly harassed by security operatives at the Lekki Toll Gate while attempting to lay flowers in honour of victims of the 2020 EndSARS protest. EiE Nigeria disclosed this in a post on X (formerly Twitter). The post read, "While peacefully laying a wreath in remembrance of the #LekkiMassacre, #_yemia was harassed by overzealous security agents. Even in honouring the dead, citizens are intimidated. She's fine — but this abuse of power is not."

Sowore lambasts police after release from custody (August 2025)

Human rights activist and 2023 presidential candidate of the African Action Congress, Omoyele Sowore, was released by the police after spending over 48 hours in detention at the Force Headquarters in Abuja. Sowore was detained after honouring an invitation by the Inspector-General of Police Monitoring Unit at the Force Headquarters in Abuja. The police had said they were investigating the activist based on two petitions bordering on alleged forgery of police documents and cyber bullying.

Adeleke's CSO Did Not Arrest Facebook User (August 2025)

The Osun State Government has denied an allegation from the All Progressives Congress (APC) that the Chief Security Officer (CSO) to Governor Ademola Adeleke was responsible for the arrest of a Facebook user who directly threatened the life of the state governor. Oluomo Kolapo Alimi, Commissioner for Information and Public Enlightenment, therefore, urged the public and the police authorities to know that the issue is not about politics but about the life of a state governor, saying "No threat to life should be taken lightly."

Edo govt demands apology over alleged defamation (June 2025)

The Edo government has issued Mr Ogbeide Ifaluyi-Isibor a 24-hour ultimatum to retract and apologize for

an allegedly defamatory social media post. Failure to comply, the government warned, will lead to both civil and criminal legal proceedings against him. The government condemned the viral post, which accused the administration of irregularities and incompetence.

NBC bans Eedris Abdulkareem's 'Tell Your Papa' song (April 2025)

The National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) has directed Nigerian radio and television stations not to air the protest song 'Tell Your Papa' by Nigerian rapper Eedris Abdulkareem. However, in a statement issued by the Coordinating Director of Broadcast Monitoring, Susan Obi, NBC stated that the song is inappropriate for broadcast. The statement titled 'Restriction on broadcasting 'Tell Your Papa' by Eedris Abdulkareem' read: "The National Broadcasting Commission has identified the song 'Tell Your Papa' by Eedris Abdulkareem, currently trending on social media, as content deemed inappropriate for broadcast due to its objectionable nature.

Court restrains Akpoti-Uduaghan from media interviews in pending case (April 2025)

The Federal High Court (FHC) in Abuja restrained Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and others from granting media interviews while the suit filed by Natasha is still pending before the court. The new judge, Justice Binta Nyako, gave the order during the hearing of the suit filed by the suspended senator to stop the Senate from investigating her. Justice Nyako ordered that no party or counsel in the suit should grant media interviews pending the hearing and determination of the case.

Court orders VeryDarkMan's arrest over defamation of Mercy Chinwo (March 2025)

The Chief Magistrate Court, Wuse Zone 6, Abuja, has issued a bench warrant for the arrest of blogger Martins Vincent Otse, popularly known as VeryDarkMan, for "criminal defamation" of the reputation of gospel singer, Mercy Chinwo. The magistrate ordered the Nigeria Police Force together with other law enforcement agencies to arrest VeryDarkMan and produce him in court to answer to the criminal allegations levelled against him. Though VeryDarkMan's lawyer, Deji Adeyanju, appealed to the magistrate to rethink the bench warrant and that he would personally produce his client in court, Iyanna rejected the appeal and insisted that VeryDarkMan be produced in court by security agencies.

Police Files 12 New Charges Against Farotimi (December 2024)

Dele Farotimi's trouble days are far from over, as the Nigerian Police have filed fresh charges against the human rights lawyer before the Federal High Court in Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State over allegations of cybercrime. Farotimi had appeared before the court following charges brought against him by Afe Babalola under the Cybercrimes (Prohibition, Prevention, Etc.) Act, 2015. The police filed 12 fresh counts against Farotimi, according to court documents.

Hamdiyya Sidi apologises to Sokoto govt over inciting comments (November 2024)

A resident of Sokoto, Hamdiyya Sidi, who is being prosecuted by the police over alleged inciting statements, has apologized to the Sokoto State Governor, Dr Ahmed Aliyu. Her arrest and subsequent prosecution had generated criticisms from Amnesty International and some women groups, even as some of the internally displaced persons have accused her of alleged deceit.

Rights group calls for release of minors charged over Nigeria protests (November 2024)

The Nigerian government is facing increasing pressure to drop charges against dozens of minors amid an uproar over detention conditions since they were arrested over their alleged participation in protests against the high cost of living. A total of 76 people, including 30 children, were arraigned and charged with 10 felony counts, including treason, destruction of property, public disturbance and mutiny. The minors ranged in age from 14 to 17 years old.

DSS invites convener of Lagos group for suing state government (September 2024)

The Department of State Services (DSS) invited one of the conveners of Ibeju-Lekki Peoples Forum, Comrade Jamiu Olayinka, for questioning over a suit asking the Lagos State government to account for the \$100 million reportedly paid by Aliko Dangote to acquire land for his refinery. The Lagos natives' leader, who was at work, was asked to honour the impromptu invitation of the secret police, according to a statement signed by the Media Officer of De Renaissance Patriots Foundation in Lagos State.

At least 21 killed in youth protests against cost of living in Nigeria (August 2024)

At least 21 people were killed during the first day of protests by young people against the high cost of living in several Nigerian cities. The protests were met by a tough crackdown by security forces, with the United Front for United Action of Civil Society (UFCS), one of the groups leading the protests, blaming the deaths of “poor management” and “operational failures” by police.

[**Nigerians protest economic hardship**](#) (March 2024)

Hundreds of Nigerians demonstrated against the soaring cost of living in the south of the country after huge protests in the north earlier this month. Nigeria is suffering an economic crisis and soaring prices have left many people struggling to afford food.

[**Nigeria imposes annual levy on expatriate workers**](#) (February 2024)

Nigeria has imposed a mandatory annual levy for organizations employing expatriate workers, requiring them to pay \$15,000 for a director and \$10,000 for other employees. The move is meant to encourage foreign companies to employ more Nigerian workers. Staff of diplomatic missions and government officials are exempt. President Bola Tinubu has warned that the levy should not be used to frustrate potential investors.

[**Nigeria Civil Society Coalition Demands Accountability Over Insecurity**](#) (January 2024)

A coalition of more than 40 civil society groups has petitioned Nigerian President Bola Tinubu, calling on him to address chronic insecurity that has only gotten worse since he assumed office last May. The petition follows a series of kidnappings in the capital, Abuja, and southwestern Ekiti state. According to a report this week by the civil society coalition, at least 2,400 people have been killed and close to 1,900 others kidnapped since May last year when Tinubu assumed office.

[**‘Emerging Judicial Corruption’ Undermining Nigeria’s Democratic Process**](#) (December 2023)

The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Center (CISLAC) says there is a need for free, fair, and credible elections to ensure patriotic, transparent and accountable leaders who will work and ensure good governance in Nigeria. CISLAC director Auwal Rafsanjani said while democracy had hitherto been threatened by a series of systemic challenges since 1999, we had anticipated to make appreciable progress than we currently have.

ARCHIVED NEWS

[New SIM Card Registrations with Biometric ID Number Resume in Nigeria](#) (April 2021)

[Court Dismisses Case Against EndSARS Protesters](#) (January 2021)

[Sowore Arrested for Organising Crossover Night Protest](#) (January 2021)

[Kano Govt Sets Up Committee to Check ‘Media Excesses’](#) (January 2020)

[We Released Sowore, Dasuki On Compassionate Grounds](#) (November 2019)

[Hate Speech Bill’s Sponsor Buckles, Proposes Removal of Death Penalty](#) (November 2019)

[Detained Nigerian journalist charged with treason](#) (September 2019)

[Why we shut down Bobrisky’s birthday party venue](#) (August 2019)

[SSS confirms arresting Sowore, Gives Reasons](#) (August 2019)

[Six Shiite protesters dead in clashes with Nigerian police](#) (July 2019)

[Channels TV reporter dies from injuries](#) (July 2019)

[NBC shuts AIT, Raypower indefinitely](#) (June 2019)

[Facebook bans Israeli-based fake accounts for interfering in Nigerian elections](#) (May 2019)

[National Assembly management issues new guidelines for journalists](#) (May 2019)

[Abuja residents, activists march, demand end to arrest of women](#) (May 2019)

[Attacks on media, observers, INEC mar polls](#) (March 2019)

[Twitter tells us why it suspended influencers' accounts ahead of elections](#) (February 2019)

[Military speaks on invasion of Daily Trust offices](#) (January 2019)

[Army launches operation python dance nationwide](#) (December 2018)

[Nigerian army lifts ban of UNICEF after spy accusations](#) (December 2018)

[Get out of Nigeria, Army warns Amnesty International](#) (December 2018)

[Activist Deji Adeyanju faces 10-year imprisonment](#) (December 2018)

[Group Protests Plateau Killings](#) (June 2018)

[Mourning for Victims of Killings](#) (May 2018)

[Elombah Brothers Plead Not Guilty](#) (April 2018)

[Police Lock Down Unity Fountain, Prevent Shiites, BBOG from Meeting](#) (April 2018)

[Why we Arrested 115 Shiite Protesters in Abuja](#) (April 2018)

[MRA calls for Speedy Presidential Assent to Digital Rights and Freedom Bill](#) (March 2018)

[DSS Demands Source of Story to Free Detained Journalist](#) (March 2018)

[Oby Ezekwesili leads fresh BBOG protest to Aso Rock](#) (January 2018)

[Court Adjourns Trial of Senator Accused of Injurious Falsehood](#) (January 2018)

[Nigeria Police to hold journalist for days over publication on IG](#) (January 2018)

historical notes

Following the declaration of Bola Tinubu of the ruling APC as winner of the presidential election in 2023, the first runner up, Atiku Abubakar of the PDP, led a protest to the offices of the Independent National Electoral Commission. In general, complaints about the conduct of the elections were elevated, while those who expressed satisfaction with the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC)'s performance were [subjected to social media attacks](#).

In a major victory for the freedom to receive and impart information, the Supreme Court ruled in April 2025 that the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act is applicable and enforceable in all 36 states. Prior to this ruling, although a few state governments had enacted state versions of the FoI Act, many had refused to honor FoI requests. It should be noted, however, that many government ministries, departments and agencies have still refused to acknowledge or act upon FoI requests themselves since April 2025 and restrictions on the media and influencers persist.

As Nigeria gears up for general elections in 2027, we are seeing a steady stream of defections of State Governors and other leading politicians to the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) – with 30 out of 36 State Governors now being members of the APC. This raises fears of one-party dominance. Arrests and criminal charges against leading opposition members have add weight to charges that the defections to the ruling party are due to threats and intimidation, rather than genuine political beliefs.

INTERNATIONAL CENTER
FOR NOT-FOR-PROFIT LAW

<https://www.icnl.org/resources/civic-freedom-monitor/nigeria>