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World Report 2021 - Nigeria

Nationwide protests calling on authorities to end police brutality and abolish an abusive police unit known as the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) received global attention and led to the dissolution of the unit. Authorities also took some action toward justice and accountability for police abuses. Protesters were however harassed and attacked by security forces and armed thugs in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory, and some states. On October 20, social media footage showing men identified as military officers shooting at peaceful protesters in Lagos sparked global outrage. Several people were reportedly killed but the [death toll remains uncertain](#).

The Covid-19 pandemic rattled Nigeria’s socio-economic landscape and highlighted serious gaps in the country’s social protection system. Covid-19 also exacerbated challenges in the humanitarian response in Nigeria’s northeast region, where the government’s armed conflict with the Islamist extremist armed group Boko Haram, now in its 11th year, has left over 7.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Insecurity in the region persisted as Boko Haram and its splinter faction, Islamic State West Africa Province (ISWAP), continued to launch attacks against civilian, humanitarian, and military targets. At least [363 civilians](#) were killed by the Islamist insurgents between January and September.

In August, authorities in Borno State in the northeast announced [plans to send 1,860,000 Internally Displaced Persons \(IDPs\) and refugees back to their communities](#) despite ongoing safety concerns. Sixteen days after IDPs were returned to Kukawa Local Government Area on August 18, [Boko Haram insurgents attacked the community and abducted at least 100 people](#). The government continued to participate in [forced returns](#) of Nigerian refugees from Cameroon.

In the northwest and parts of the south, intercommunal violence continued as herder-allied armed groups, vigilantes, and criminal gangs killed hundreds of civilians, kidnapped people for ransom, and raided cattle.

Widespread sexual violence against women and girls, including an attack that led to the [death of a student](#) in May, spurred a national outcry and prompted the authorities to declare a national emergency over rape and sexual violence.

Thousands of people with mental health conditions remain chained and locked up in various facilities, including state hospitals, rehabilitation centers, traditional healing centers, and both Christian and Islamic faith-based facilities. In February, the Senate Committee on Health held a public hearing on a draft mental health bill.

Covid-19

Since Nigeria recorded its [first case of Covid-19](#) in February, authorities have taken various steps to curb the spread of the virus, including [“lockdowns”](#) in most states, requiring residents to stay indoors and for businesses to close, except certain essential services. By August, Nigeria’s economy had [shrunk by 6 percent](#).

The economic assistance announced in response to the pandemic failed to adequately target and provide for those left struggling to afford food and other basic necessities. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, [over 90 million Nigerians](#) lived in extreme poverty on less than \$1.90 a day; the World Bank projected in June that the economic shock from [Covid-19 will push 5 million more into poverty](#). The pandemic also brought into focus the country’s inadequate healthcare infrastructure, which created inequitable access to Covid-19 testing and treatment for the poor and vulnerable.

The lockdown in Lagos State had a devastating and disproportionate impact on the livelihoods of the poor, many of whom rely on daily wages for subsistence and did not receive any economic relief from the government. Barriers to access to testing and treatment and inadequate Covid-19

education campaigns targeting those living in poor communities have also denied them equal access to healthcare.

Security forces used excessive force when enforcing stay at home orders, [killing at least 18 people](#) between March 30 and April 13, according to the National Human Rights Commission.

Schools were closed for at least six months due to the pandemic, affecting about [37 million](#) children. In September, the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) announced that it had [uncovered payments](#) totaling 2.67 billion naira (about US\$6.9 million) made to federal colleges for school meals during the lockdown, when children were not in school, which ended up in personal accounts.

Abuses by Boko Haram

Boko Haram and its splinter faction ISWAP continued attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers in the northeast.

In one of its deadliest attacks, Boko Haram reportedly [killed about 81 people, injured 10 and abducted seven](#) others in Gubio Local Government Area of Borno State in June. Days later, Boko Haram staged additional [attacks in Gubio, Ngazai and Mongonu LGAs](#), killing at least 40 people and damaging a major humanitarian facility.

In January, ISWAP released a [video of a boy it depicted as a member executing a man](#) identified as a Christian hostage. Also in January, Boko Haram insurgents [abducted](#) and executed [Reverend Lawan Andimi](#), chairman of the Christian Association of Nigeria, in Adamawa State.

In the same month, suspected Boko Haram insurgents [attacked a](#) United Nations facility housing several aid groups in Ngala, Borno State. At least 20 IDPs awaiting assistance at the facility were killed, according to media reports. In July, [five men including three humanitarian workers were executed](#) by the Islamist insurgents, who circulated a video of the execution on social media.

Boko Haram also launched a deadly attack against Borno State Governor Babagana Zulum’s convoy on September 27, as he was returning to the state capital, Maiduguri, from Baga. At least 18 people, including [four civilians](#) were killed. The attack came two days after the governor survived another attack while traveling to an area near Lake Chad. His convoy was also ambushed earlier in July by insurgents.

Restrictions on Humanitarian Access in the Northeast

Military authorities continued to [impose undue restrictions and requirements on humanitarian agencies in the northeast](#), which impede their ability to deliver timely and effective aid and run contrary to the humanitarian principle of independence.

Humanitarian agencies were restricted from operating outside government-controlled areas and must undergo lengthy processes to obtain compulsory authorization for moving personnel, cash, and cargo carrying relief materials in the northeast region, among other restrictions.

Intercommunal Violence

Intercommunal violence continued in many parts of the country. In April, [armed bandits killed at least 47 people](#) in a coordinated attack on several villages in Katsina State in the northwest. According to the UN refugee agency, [at least 1,126 people died between January and June in the northwest region](#), 210,000 people were internally displaced and over 70,000 fled to seek refuge in Niger as at August due to the insecurity in the region.

In the southern Kaduna State, media [reported that](#) gunmen killed at least 43 people between July 21 to 24, and that [178 people](#) were killed between January and July across southern Kaduna communities.

In April, at least [19 people were killed and about 100 houses burned in fighting](#) between members of different ethnic groups in the northeastern Taraba State who were disputing fishing rights.

Accountability for Serious Crimes

In September, a [military court dismissed and sentenced](#) an army officer to a prison term of five years for “assaulting and defiling” a 13-year-old girl in 2018 while serving in Borno State. Beyond this, there was little progress on accountability for security force abuses within the context of the northeast conflict. The report of the Presidential Judicial Panel set up in August 2017 to investigate the military’s compliance with human rights obligations, allegations of war crimes, and other abuses has still not been made public despite repeated calls from civil society and international actors.

Trials for hundreds of suspected Boko Haram insurgents slated for February in Maiduguri were postponed until further notice, following previous delays in January and in December 2019. Boko Haram suspects last faced trials in July 2018. Most of the more than 200 defendants in the [July 2018 trials](#) faced charges of material and non-violent support for Boko Haram, and some had been detained since 2009. The trials were fraught with irregularities including lack of interpreters, inadequate legal defense, lack of prosecutable evidence or witnesses, and non-participation of victims.

Nigeria's [military released at least 333 children](#) who were detained in the northeast for up to five years on suspicion of being Boko Haram members.

The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) continued its preliminary examination of the situation in Nigeria, which focuses on alleged crimes against humanity or war crimes committed in the Niger Delta, the Middle-Belt states, and the conflict between Boko Haram and Nigerian security forces.

Freedom of Expression, Media, and Association

The police continued to arrest, detain, and use excessive force against peaceful protesters. In March, security forces [fired live ammunition](#) and teargas to disperse members of the Shia Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN), who took to the streets in Abuja to protest the detention of their leader, Sheik El Zakzaky, since 2015. [Two people sustained gunshot injuries, and at least 10 people were arrested and detained.](#)

Authorities continued to clamp down on nationwide [“Revolution Now”](#) protests against insecurity and corruption, arresting and briefly detaining over 60 people during protests in Abuja in August.

Blasphemy-related cases in the north gained widespread attention and condemnation. Nigerian law criminalizes insult to religion. [Sharia \(Islamic law\)](#) applicable in the country's 12 northern states with a significant or majority Muslim population, including Kano, also criminalize blasphemy. Nigeria's constitution, however, protects freedom of thought, conscience, and religion, and guarantees the right to freedom of expression.

In April, police in Kaduna State arrested [Bala Mubarak](#), president of the Nigerian Humanist Association, a nongovernmental organization, following a complaint by lawyers who accused him of publicly insulting the Prophet Muhammad on his Facebook [page](#). Police transferred him to Kano State where he was being held incommunicado at time of writing.

In August, a Sharia Court in Kano [sentenced a musician, Yahaya Sharif- Aminu, to death](#) for blasphemy against the Prophet Muhammed in a song circulated via WhatsApp. Also, in August, a 13-year-old boy was sentenced by a Sharia court to 10 years in prison for making “profane remarks” about God during an argument with a friend in northern Kano State.

Civil society groups raised [concerns](#) over a new Corporate and Allied Matters Act, signed into law in August, being potentially used as a tool to restrict civic space and limit basic freedoms. The law empowers Nigeria's Corporate Affairs Commission to suspend the trustees of any registered association for reasons including fraud, misconduct, mismanagement or public interest and to appoint interim managers.

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Charges against 47 men for crimes under the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) of 2014 were [struck out](#) in October after the court found that the prosecution had failed to diligently prosecute the case and provide evidence. The trial, which began on December 2019, is the [first to be brought under the SSMPA](#), which criminalizes same-sex conduct as well as public displays of same-sex amorous relationships, same-sex marriages, and the registration of gay clubs, societies, and organizations.

Key International Actors

Nigeria received significant loans from the [International Monetary Fund](#), the [African Development Bank](#), and the [World Bank](#) to support the country's health care sector and to shield jobs and businesses from the shock of the Covid-19 pandemic.

In June, the Nigerian Humanitarian Fund managed by the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [announced](#) that it had received a US\$22.4 million funding allocation to address the increased vulnerability of people affected by both the Covid-19 pandemic and the humanitarian crisis in the northeast.

The [United States](#), the [European Union](#), and the [United Kingdom](#) continued to provide Nigeria with humanitarian and development aid.

They also repeatedly expressed concerns over terrorist attacks in the country, including attacks against civilians and humanitarian workers.

In January, the European Parliament adopted a [resolution](#) deploring the attacks, urging the government to respect human rights in its counterterrorism response and to end the military detention of children.

Foreign Policy

Nigeria [supported](#) the efforts of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, and the United Nations in pressing for a swift return to civilian government after the military takeover in Mali in August, which President Muhammadu Buhari described as a setback to regional diplomacy.

Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, Nigeria’s permanent representative to the United Nations, completed his term as the 74th president of the UN General Assembly. During his presidency, he advanced issues around education, poverty, and inclusion, including [a landmark political commitment on universal health coverage](#).

Nigeria, which currently sits on the UN Human Rights Council, abstained from voting on some key [resolutions](#), including those on the conflicts in Syria and Yemen, and on human rights in Venezuela, Nicaragua, Burundi, Eritrea, and Iran. Nigeria voted in favor of other [resolutions](#) to advance rights protections, including on accountability for violations of international law in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, and on human rights in Myanmar.

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