

# Nigeria 2023 Human Rights Report

## Executive Summary

There were no significant changes in the human rights situation in Nigeria in the past year.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: arbitrary and unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings; torture or 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; serious restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence or threats of violence against journalists and enforcement of criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious government corruption; extensive 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; enforcement of laws criminalizing consensual same-sex sexual conduct between adults; and existence of any of the worst forms of child labor.

The government took credible steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses, but impunity for such abuses and corruption was a problem.

Nonstate actors committed arbitrary and unlawful killings, disappearances, physical abuse, and other mistreatment. Boko Haram and the Islamic State in West Africa continued attacks on civilians, military, police, humanitarian, and religious targets; unlawfully recruited and forcefully conscripted child soldiers; and carried out scores of attacks on population centers in the North East region. 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. Authorities attempted to investigate and prosecute such actions.

## **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 or unlawful killings, including extrajudicial killings.

There were numerous killings reported similar to the following examples. In January, police in Katsina opened fire after responding to a call at a wedding party, killing two and injuring three. On April 5, a police officer in Delta State killed a man for reportedly for refusing to pay a 100 naira (\$0.16) bribe at a checkpoint. The officer claimed the shooting was accidental. The officer was dismissed from the police force and faced prosecution for alleged murder.

On July 2, three soldiers were reported to have opened fire on community neighborhood watch guards as the guards responded to reports of a bandit attack in Enugu State. Two guards were killed and four injured while the military accused the guards of being bandits themselves. The National Assembly stood up an ad hoc committee to investigate the incident.

Some state governments created quasi-independent security forces. These forces tended to be from the same geographic area or ethnic group. 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. 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. In May, the People's Democratic Party accused Amotekun of killing two individuals that month in Ondo State, including one child. Courts disbanded another security group, Ebubeagu Security Network, over its human rights abuses.

Although the National Economic Council directed states to establish judicial panels following the 2020 #EndSARS nationwide protests, authorities had not yet held actors accountable. In July, a leaked Lagos State memo dated July 19 indicated the state government approved an expenditure of 61.3 million naira (\$97,460) for the "mass burial" of 103 victims from the 2020 #EndSARS protests who remained in morgues, which raised questions regarding the extent of the abuses that took place during those protests. The Lagos State Ministry of Health confirmed the authenticity of the memo. A senior Lagos State official stated the bodies were collected from at least a dozen locations across the state in the aftermath of violence during the protests and other clashes related to it, although not from the 2020 Lekki Toll Gate incident, where soldiers allegedly shot at unarmed protesters and killed at least 11 individuals.

## **b. Disappearance**

There were no reports of disappearances by or on behalf of government authorities.

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

The law mostly prohibited such practices, but there were credible reports government officials employed them.

The law defined and criminalized torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of arrestees but failed to prescribe penalties for violators. The law prohibiting torture and cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of arrestees applied only to the Federal Capital Territory and federal agencies unless the individual states adopted legislation compliant with it. Thirty of the country's 36 states had adopted either the law itself or compliant legislation at year's end.

On June 26, Angela Uzoma-Iwuchukwu, the director of *Avocats Sans Frontieres*, said at a public event commemorating international day in support of victims of torture that her office handled 1,200 cases involving victims of torture. She further stated some security agencies used torture to extract confessions.

Impunity for torture was a significant problem in the security forces, especially in police, military, and the Department of State Services (DSS). The government regularly investigated security force members and held them accountable for crimes committed on duty, but the results were not always made public. In June, the inspector general of police disbanded a police unit following an incident in Edo State in which members of that unit ran over a handcuffed man.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison and detention center conditions were harsh and life threatening due to gross overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and food and water shortages.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** Overcrowding was a significant problem. As of September, prison facilities had 50 percent more inmates than designed capacity. 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.

Lack of potable water, inadequate sewage facilities, and overcrowding sometimes resulted in dangerous and unsanitary conditions. Disease was 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. 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).

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.

**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.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government permitted limited monitoring of prisons by independent nongovernmental observers. 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 prohibited arbitrary arrest and detention and provided for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of their arrest or detention in court. The government sometimes did not observe these requirements.

### **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

Police and other security services had the authority to arrest individuals without a warrant if officials reasonably suspected a person committed a crime. Security forces sometimes abused this authority. The law required subjects be brought before a magistrate within 48 hours and have access to lawyers and family members. In some instances, government and security employees did not adhere to this regulation.

The law required an arresting officer to allow the suspect to obtain counsel, and post bail for some crimes. Provision of bail was often arbitrary or subject to extrajudicial influence. In many areas with no functioning bail system, suspects were incarcerated indefinitely in investigative detention. Numerous detainees stated police demanded bribes to take them to court hearings or to release them.

The government's Legal Aid Council's Duty Solicitor Scheme was unable to provide free legal advice at all government detention facilities because of a lack of funding.

At times, authorities kept detainees incommunicado for long periods.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** Security personnel reportedly arbitrarily arrested numerous persons during the year. 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.

On June 10, the DSS detained suspended Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele “for investigative reasons.” On July 25, the Federal High Court in Lagos granted Emefiele bail and ordered he be held at the Ikoyi Correctional Centre until the bail was made. However, the DSS immediately attempted to arrest Emefiele again, and a fight reportedly broke out between DSS agents and Nigerian Correctional Service officers as each group tried to take Emefiele into custody. Emefiele was released on bail on November 8. Emefiele was later charged with corruption.

The DSS continued to detain on national security grounds Nnamdi Kanu, leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra, a government-designated terrorist organization, on charges including treason, terrorism, and illegal possession of firearms. In 2017, Kanu fled abroad after skipping bail, but was arrested and returned to the country in 2021. In 2022, an appeals court in Abuja dropped all charges against Kanu and ordered his release, which the federal government appealed. On December 15, the Supreme Court overturned the appeals court ruling and stated Kanu faced terrorism charges, even though

Nigeria's secret police had violated Kanu's rights during his arrest and extradition. Kanu remained incarcerated at year's end.

**Pretrial Detention:** Lengthy pretrial detention was 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. 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 individuals remained in detention because authorities lost their case files. In general, the courts were plagued with inadequate, antiquated systems and procedures.

## **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution and law provided for an independent judiciary, but the government did not respect judicial independence and impartiality. The judicial branch was 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.

## **Trial Procedures**

The constitution provided for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary did not always enforce this right.

In some cases, police detained suspects without informing them of the charges against them or allowing access to counsel. Human rights groups stated the government did not permit all terrorism suspects detained by the military their rights to legal representation, due process, and to be heard by a judicial authority. Some individuals whose cases were dismissed reportedly remained in detention without clear legal justification.

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 men and women defendants to prove adultery or fornication.

## **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were no reports of political prisoners or detainees.

## **f. Transnational Repression**

Not applicable.

## **g. Property Seizure and Restitution**

State and local governments forcibly evicted some residents and demolished their homes, often without sufficient notice or compensation, and sometimes in violation of court orders. In July, authorities demolished approximately 20 homes in Lagos State. Local law in some cases did not provide for compensation for house demolitions if the person did not own the land and had not obtained building permissions from the government.

## **h. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The law prohibited such actions, but there were reports the government failed to respect such prohibitions. At times, police entered homes without judicial or other appropriate authorization.

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

## **i. Conflict-related Abuses**

The insurgency in the North East region by the militant terrorist groups Boko Haram and ISIS-West Africa (ISIS-WA) continued. The groups conducted numerous attacks on government and civilian targets, resulting in thousands of deaths and injuries, widespread destruction of property, internal

displacement of more than two million persons, and external displacement of an estimated 355,000 Nigerian refugees in Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

**Killings:** Military operations against ISIS-WA, Boko Haram, and criminal bandit targets resulted in civilian deaths. On January 24, a government air strike reportedly targeting bandits in Kwatiri, a rural community on the border of Benue and Nasarawa states, reportedly killed approximately 39 civilians, most of whom were said to be herders who had gathered to retrieve their cattle that had been confiscated by the Benue Livestock Guards. Nearly six months after the bombing, after initially denying any involvement, authorities admitted carrying out the raid, but stated those killed were terrorists. The government did not provide information on investigations of the incident.

On December 3, army drones attacked a religious gathering in Tudun Biri village in Kaduna State that was marking the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, killing at least 85 individuals and possibly as many as 120. The army admitted responsibility for the airstrike, whose apparent targets were criminal bandits, and issued an apology. President Tinubu ordered an investigation into the airstrike.

There were numerous reports of deliberate killings or deaths resulting from attacks by violent extremists. In October suspected Boko Haram militants shot at villagers and set off a land mine in Yobe State, killing at least 40 individuals. On December 23 and 24, unknown gunmen attacked 17 villages

in Plateau State and killed at least 150 individuals. Local leaders blamed herders for the attack.

Attacks attributed to religious or ethnic motivations resulted in significant deaths outside of violent extremist organization attacks.

**Abductions:** Abductions were an illicit industry in many parts of the country as criminal and terrorist groups regularly conducted kidnapping for ransom. In April, 29 individuals in a village within the Federal Capital Territory were kidnapped. In August, suspected violent extremists kidnapped more than 40 women and demanded ransoms in one part of Borno State, while in another part of the state, government troops rescued 25 captives from a suspected Boko Haram camp.

In April, the military rescued two of the 219 girls abducted by Boko Haram from the Chibok School in 2014 and their children in Borno State. Fewer than 100 remained captive. Leah Sharibu was 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.

**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 sexual violence or other forms of abuse. There were reports the government arrested and, in some cases, inappropriately detained for prolonged periods – reportedly for security screening and perceived intelligence value – women and children removed

from or allegedly associated with Boko Haram and ISIS-WA, including women and girls who insurgents had forcibly married or sexually enslaved. There were reports authorities held many detainees in poor conditions in the North East region, and some of the detained included children believed to be associated with Boko Haram, some of whom might have been forcibly recruited. The government began implementation of a protocol signed in September 2022, but it was not fully implemented by year's end. Under it, any children believed to be associated with armed groups should be transferred to the Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development within seven days of being identified.

Boko Haram and ISIS-WA engaged in widespread gender-based violence against women and girls, including rape and forced marriage. Reports indicated some women rescued by government forces had been forcibly married multiple times as successive husbands died fighting government security forces.

**Other Conflict-related Abuse:** Threats of attacks by ISIS-WA on humanitarian assistance convoys and aid workers constrained the provision of assistance to internally displaced persons (IDP) 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 provided for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, in some cases the government restricted these rights. Authorities sometimes used laws against libel, slander, and blasphemy or “insult to religion” to restrict speech.

**Freedom of Expression:** There were reported cases in which the government restricted the ability of individuals to criticize the government. Critics of the government reported at times being subjected to threats, intimidation, arrest, detention, and violence. The government used broad “cyberstalking” charges to arrest internet users who posted derogatory statements concerning public figures. On March 18, police arrested Nnamdi Chude for cyberstalking after he posted a tweet claiming Anambra State Governor Chukwuma Soludo was involved in “rigging” the National Assembly election. He was later arraigned on a cyberstalking charge for claiming Emeka Offor, a businessman, had been asked by then-President-elect Tinubu to beg another candidate to accept the February election result.

**Violence and Harassment:** There were reports security services detained, harassed, and threatened journalists, or stood by as others attacked journalists. Security services detained, harassed, or attacked at least 14 journalists during national elections on February 25 and attacked 28 more during state elections on March 18, according to the Committee to Protect Journalists.

**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 was responsible for monitoring and regulating broadcast media. Cable and satellite transmission was less restricted.

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 was a criminal offense, and the government enforced this law by arresting journalists. Intentionally insulting religion to cause offense was criminalized as a misdemeanor through state criminal and penal codes. Penalties included imprisonment for two to five years or fines.

On July 27, police arrested radio journalist Chinonso Uba, popularly known as Nonso Nkwa, for statements insulting Imo Governor Hope Uzodinma. On August 18, a court ordered his release, and authorities complied on August 29. Police arrested blogger and adherent of the traditional Isele religion Azeez Adegbola, popularly known as Tani Olohun, after he made a video of the shredding and burning of a Quran. He reportedly also called on Isele adherents to attack a local Islamic leader. Adegbola was charged with criminal conspiracy, insulting contempt of religious creed, criminal defamation, and inciting disturbance.

## **Internet Freedom**

The government did not restrict or disrupt access to the internet or censor online content.

## **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The government limited freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution and law provided for freedom of assembly. The government occasionally banned and targeted public demonstrations, meetings, and other gatherings when it concluded their political, ethnic, or religious nature might lead to unrest, especially in areas experiencing societal violence. In August, the government attempted to stop workers

from engaging in country-wide protests against the price of petrol by taking the major unions to court.

## **Freedom of Association**

The constitution and law provided 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 rendered illegal all forms of activity supporting or promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) rights. The law criminalized the registration, operation, or participation in so-called gay clubs, societies, or organizations and further prohibited any support to such organizations. 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 provided for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and authorities generally respected these 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 by authorities and other armed groups.

## **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN 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 provided for the granting of asylum or refugee status, and the government had an established 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. UNHCR reported continuing concerns regarding ineffective civil registration and identification management systems in areas hosting refugees and returnees. 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 healthcare.

## **f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

As of July, UNHCR reported there were approximately 2.4 million persons displaced in the North East region, 609,000 in the North West region, and 580,000 in the North Central region. Insurgency was the reason for most displacements, followed by communal clashes.

IDPs, especially those in the North East region, faced severe insecurity, including terrorist attacks, lack of accountability for and diversion of humanitarian aid, and gender-based violence, including sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse. Security services arrested 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.

For further information concerning IDPs in the country, please see the materials of the Internal Displacement Monitoring Center:

<https://www.internal-displacement.org>.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The law provided 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**

**Abuses or Irregularities in Recent Elections:** National elections were widely reported to have reflected the will of voters, despite technical and logistical difficulties, and some irregularities. Many independent observers assessed the results of the presidential, legislative, and state-level elections during the year reflected the will of voters, despite reports of voter suppression and vote buying, campaigning at polling stations, lack of ballot secrecy, violence, and intimidation. During the March 18 state election in Lagos, All Progressives Congress (APC) supporters reportedly intimidated and suppressed voters in Igbo-dominated areas, which Labour Party presidential candidate and ethnically Igbo Peter Obi won in the February 25 national election. Viral videos on social media showed APC supporters in Ojo threatening to attack ethnic Igbo voters presumed to be pro-Obi. In Eti-Osa,

APC supporters also attacked journalists and, in some cases, shut down voting and prevented non-Yoruba voters from accessing polls. They similarly destroyed property and physically blocked voters in Amuwo-Odofin. According to videos posted on social media, police officers were present but failed to respond to attacks. There was no evidence that alleged perpetrators were arrested or prosecuted.

### **Participation of Women and Members of Marginalized or Vulnerable**

**Groups:** The national average of women’s political participation in Nigeria was 6.7 percent in elected and appointed positions. Civil society organization observers noted religious, cultural, and economic barriers contributed to fewer leadership opportunities for women in major parties and government. A gender-based violence survey of the 2023 elections conducted by the NGO ElectHER said religious and cultural barriers such as double standards, blackmailing, and media smear campaigns were actively used against women politicians. Media outlets stereotyped women politicians as “promiscuous” or “cunning” and in some cases refused to cover their campaigns allegedly on the orders of opposition officials and candidates. In addition, the law criminalizing LGBTQI+ free association and assembly effectively prevented openly LGBTQI+ persons from running for office.

## Section 4. Corruption in Government

Although the law provided 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 sectors of government, including the judiciary and security services.

In August, President Tinubu appointed former governor Abubakar Bagudu the Minister of Budget, despite Bagudu's widely reported history of helping then-President Sani Abacha steal hundreds of millions of dollars from the government in the 1990s.

Police arrested former Central Bank Governor Godwin Emefiele on June 10 and charged him and a co-defendant in defrauding the government of 6.5 billion naira (\$10.4 million), later reduced to 1.6 billion naira (\$2.5 million).

For additional information concerning corruption in the country, please see the Department of State's *Investment Climate Statement* for the country, and the Department of State's *International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*, which includes information on financial crimes.

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

A variety of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restriction to monitor or investigate human rights conditions or cases and publish their findings. Government officials were often cooperative and responsive to the views of these groups.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The law established the National Human Rights Commission as an independent nonjudicial mechanism for the promotion and protection of human rights. The commission investigated allegations of human rights abuses and published periodic reports detailing its findings, including torture and poor prison conditions. Observers considered the commission to be independent and somewhat effective, but the commission could not compel the government to prosecute perpetrators of human rights abuses. On February 7, the Commission opened a Special Independent Investigative Panel in response to a series of investigative articles published by Reuters in December 2022 alleging human rights abuses by the military in the North East.

## Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses

### Women

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalized the rape of women but not of men. Spousal rape was not criminalized. The law criminalized various forms of domestic violence. The government did not effectively enforce the law.

Sentences for persons convicted of rape and sexual assault were inconsistent and often minor. Federal law provided penalties ranging from 12 years to life imprisonment for offenders older than 14 and a maximum of 14 years' imprisonment for offenders age 14 and younger. It also provided for survivors to receive various forms of assistance (e.g., medical, psychosocial, legal, rehabilitative, and for reintegration). The law also included provisions to protect the identity of rape survivors and empowered courts to award appropriate compensation to survivors. Because the relevant federal law had not been adopted in all states, state law governed most rape and sexual assault cases and typically allowed for lesser sentences. While some states enacted laws prohibiting some forms of gender-based violence or sought to safeguard certain rights, most states did not have such legislation.

Police often refused to intervene in domestic violence cases or blamed the survivor 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.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C):** Federal law criminalized FGM/C. A 2022 report from the UN Population Fund found 22 of 36 states had laws against FGM/C. Enforcement of the law was rare. NGOs reported they had to convince local authorities these state laws applied in their districts.

**Other Forms of Gender-based Violence or Harassment:** According to the law, any person convicted of subjecting another person to harmful traditional practices could be punished with up to four years' imprisonment, a fine, or both. For purposes of the law, harmful traditional practices meant 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. 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.

No statutes prohibited sexual harassment, but assault statutes provided for prosecution of violent harassment, with penalties of up to three years' imprisonment. The law criminalized stalking as well as 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 was common.

**Discrimination:** The constitution and law generally provided the same legal status and rights for women as for men. Women, however, experienced considerable economic discrimination. The law did not mandate equal remuneration for work of equal value, nor did it mandate nondiscrimination based on gender in hiring. There were reports some businesses implemented a “get pregnant, get fired” policy for women employees. The law prohibited women from working at night in specific labor sectors.

No laws prohibited 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 claimed 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.

**Reproductive Rights:** The National Human Rights Commission investigated the allegations made in a 2022 Reuters report of 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.

Many couples and individuals did not have access to the information and the means to access safe, effective, and affordable methods of family planning. 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.

In some states, health-care workers frequently required women to provide proof of spousal consent prior to accessing contraceptives. Adolescent-friendly reproductive health services and interventions were usually not provided within the health system. 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.

In the northern part of the country, societal and cultural norms prevented women from leaving the house unaccompanied, making reproductive health services less accessible.

The government provided 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 postexposure 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, owing to laws criminalizing abortion except in cases in which delivering would place the mother's life in danger.

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.

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

## Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination

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

All citizens had 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.

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.

## Children

**Education:** Extensive discrimination and impediments to women's and girls' participation in education persisted, particularly in the north.

**Child Abuse:** There were laws against child abuse, but these laws required ratification by each state and not all states had ratified them. The government did not enforce these laws effectively. The government took no significant measures to combat child abuse, which was common.

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

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** Federal law set a minimum age of 18 for marriage for both boys and girls. While 35 states, all except Zamfara State, adopted the law, many states, especially northern states, did not uphold the federal minimum age. In some states, children as young as 11 could be legally married under customary or religious law. The government worked with local and international partners to engage religious leaders, emirs, and sultans on the issue, emphasizing the health hazards of early marriage.

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

**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law prohibited child commercial sexual exploitation, child sex trafficking, and sexual intercourse with a child, although it did not explicitly mention sale or grooming. The law criminalized the production, procurement, distribution, and possession of child pornography. Authorities did not always enforce these laws. The minimum age for sexual consent varied according to state law.

**Infanticide, Including Infanticide of Children with Disabilities:** Media reports indicated some communities killed infants born as twins or with birth defects or albinism. Authorities rarely prosecuted perpetrators.

## **Antisemitism**

The Jewish population of Nigeria was estimated to be between 2,000 and 40,000. There were no known reports of antisemitic incidents.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

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

## **Forced Organ Harvesting**

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

On March 23, a British court convicted former Deputy President of the Senate Ike Ekweremadu for allegedly trafficking a man from Nigeria to the United Kingdom to harvest the man's kidney for transplant to Ekweremadu's daughter. The court also convicted Ekweremadu's wife and a Nigerian doctor residing in the United Kingdom. Ekweremadu was sentenced to more than nine months' imprisonment.

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

**Criminalization:** The law criminalized same-sex marriage, same-sex relationships, membership in LGBTQI+ rights groups, and the public display of same-sex “amorous affection.” In the 12 states with sharia, adults convicted of engaging in same-sex sexual conduct could be sentenced to execution by stoning. Authorities actively enforced this law, but capital punishment was never carried out.

Facially neutral laws, such as those against “unlawful assembly” and “public nuisance,” were disproportionately applied against LGBTQI+ persons or those perceived to be LGBTQI+. On June 24, police arrested 24 persons perceived to be LGBTQI+ at a private party in Abuja. The arrestees were charged with unlawful assembly and public nuisance; all were free on bail at year’s end although charges were pending.

On August 27, police in Delta State raided a “white party” organized by the LGBTQI+ community and detained more than 200 individuals. Police alleged the event was a same-sex wedding, but some civil society organization representatives stated authorities had fabricated this allegation to justify the raid. By September 28, all detainees were released on bail, although charges were pending at year’s end.

**Violence and Harassment:** LGBTQI+ persons reported violence, threats (including extortion), and harassment based on actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, including by state actors. On August 29, a man age 27 physically assaulted a transgender woman, reportedly targeted for her identity, and forced her to transfer money into his bank account. The man was charged with crimes related to theft and assault. The case was pending at year's end.

LGBTQI+ persons were targeted via social media apps by criminals. A gay man reported to an NGO he had traveled from Lagos to Ogun State in December to meet a man he had communicated with on a social media app. He stated that when he arrived at the address, a gang assaulted him and forced him to reveal his ATM card PIN. The gang then withdrew his savings and took out two loans in his name.

**Discrimination:** The law did not prohibit discrimination by state or nonstate actors based on sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, or sex characteristics. LGBTQI+ persons reported discrimination in employment, housing, and access to healthcare based on their real or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity or expression. The law criminalized same sex marriage and civil unions.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** Legal gender recognition was not available.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices:** There were no laws regulating “conversion therapy.” A report on “conversion” practices by the NGO The Initiative for Equal Rights (TIERS) in 2021 found approximately half of the survey’s LGBTQI+ respondents had been subjected to involuntary or coerced “conversion therapy,” including involuntary talk therapy, electrocution, religious rituals, physical deprivation, being forced into marriages with the opposite sex, and “corrective” rape. 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.

Surgeries were sometimes performed on children and nonconsenting adult intersex persons.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:**

The law restricted many activities that support or promote the rights of LGBTQI+ persons. For example, the law criminalized support for LGBTQI+ marriages or civil unions. Multiple NGOs with objectives of interest to LGBTQI+ persons, however, operated legally by pursuing related goals, such as providing legal advice or HIV and AIDS awareness.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

While the law prohibited discrimination based on disability and provided 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.

Children with disabilities faced significant hurdles obtaining educational services. Inclusion programs in mainstream schools were rare. Individuals with disabilities faced significant barriers to civic participation. While the February presidential election was the first in which the law mandated polling places have assistive devices for individuals with disabilities, civil society groups reported 30 percent of polling places were not accessible for those with mobility disabilities. Moreover, while the government touted the provision of braille guides and magnifying glasses, the NGO TAF Africa reported poor deployment of these devices during the elections.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Members of both Christian and Muslim groups reported 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.

Individuals born with albinism faced discrimination, stigmatization, and were sometimes abandoned at birth or killed for witchcraft purposes.

Individuals with HIV faced widespread stigma and discrimination, and were often ostracized by the community, fired from their jobs, or cast away from family. The federal and state governments worked 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 sometimes 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.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The law provided workers the right to form or belong to a trade union or other association, bargain collectively, and conduct legal strikes. Some statutory limitations substantially restricted these rights. The law prohibited anti-union discrimination but did not adequately protect against it.

Substantial restrictions on the rights of workers to form and join a union included, for example, the requirement of prior authorization or approval by

the ministry to establish a union. A new trade union could not register if it had fewer than 50 members or another union was already registered in the trade or profession. Lengthy notice periods and an unlimited timeline for the ministry to deliberate on objections also deterred legitimate worker organization. Penalties were imposed for organizing or joining an unrecognized organization.

The law limited the scope of collective bargaining. For example, every collective agreement on wages had to be registered with the National Salaries, Income, and Wages Commission, which decided whether the agreement became binding. The law placed restrictions on workers' right to strike. For example, the law required a majority vote of all registered union members to call a strike and limited 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, could be subject to a compulsory arbitration procedure leading to a final award, which would be binding on the parties concerned. Strikes based on disputed national economic policy were prohibited. Penalties for participating in an illegal strike included fines and imprisonment for up to six months.

Workers and employers in export processing zones (EPZ) had fewer legal protections than other workers. The law did not allow worker representatives free access to the EPZs to organize workers, and it prohibited 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, had exclusive authority to handle the resolution of disputes between employers and employees, thereby limiting the autonomy of the bargaining partners.

The law defined “essential services” more broadly than recommended by the International Labor Organization, 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 allegations of antiunion discrimination and obstruction of collective bargaining were reported. 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.

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 was 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.

In August, police arrested the leadership of the National Union of Road Transport Workers after a physical altercation broke out among competing factions. One side was quickly released, while the elected officials of the union were released later, leading some in media to say it was an attempt to help one faction in an internal union fight.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

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 (see section 6)**

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The law provided 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 higher than the poverty income level. Many employers had fewer than 25 employees, so most workers were not covered. Some states declined to implement the minimum wage law, citing financial constraints.

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

**Occupational Safety and Health:** There were occupational safety and health (OSH) standards generally appropriate 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. By law workers could remove themselves from situations endangering health or safety without jeopardy to their employment, but authorities did not effectively protect employees in these situations. Sectors in which alleged

violations of OSH standards were common included factories, mining, and petroleum.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The government rarely effectively enforced minimum wage, overtime, and OSH laws. Penalties were low, not commensurate with other crimes such as fraud, and rarely applied. The Ministry of Labor and Employment was responsible for enforcement of wage, hour, and OSH laws, but the number of labor inspectors was insufficient to enforce compliance. Although the law gave labor inspectors authority to make unannounced visits and initiate sanctions, it stipulated most individuals needed to initiate their own complaint before the National Industrial Court of Nigeria to report noncompliance and seek redress.

Between 70 and 80 percent of the country's working population worked in the informal economy. Authorities did not enforce wage, hour, and OSH laws and inspections in the informal sector or with part time workers.