

Nigeria: Security situation

As a security actor, Nigeria provides a contrasting picture. While the country has asserted its role as a major security player in western Africa and on the African continent, where it has taken part in numerous peace operations; at home, its security forces have had difficulty tackling multiple internal security threats, including terrorism, sectarian conflicts and local insurgencies.

An important international security actor, but weak domestic military

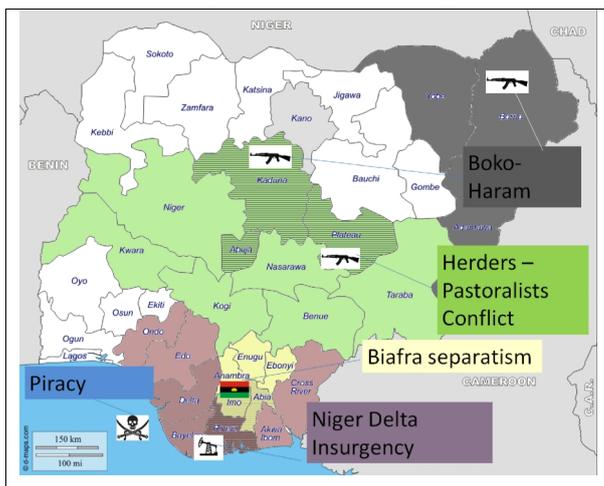
Nigeria has built a reputation as an internationally active security actor. In 2013, Nigeria [became](#) the first African country to ratify the international [Arms Trade Treaty](#), and Nigeria is a [member](#) of the [Peace and Security Council](#) of the African Union. Given its size, Nigeria is a major presence on the continent, and a natural hegemon in west Africa, a role that it has [assumed](#) on multiple occasions. The Nigerian armed forces took part in [ECOWAS mission](#) military operations in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s, providing most of the military and civilian staff and playing a pivotal role in ending the conflict. Nigeria has also provided staff to over [25 UN peacekeeping missions](#) (including to Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina). Currently it participates in several UN missions, to [Mali](#), [Darfur-Sudan](#), [Liberia](#), and to the African Union led mission in Somalia ([AMISOM](#)). Nigeria is leading the Multinational Joint Task Force (expected to reach [10 500](#) staff), authorised by the African Union to fight Boko Haram in the Lake Chad region, which also includes troops from Benin, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger.

However, since the mid-2000s, Nigeria's domestic security challenges have affected its ability to participate in peace operations. While between 2008 and 2013, Nigeria [ranked](#) fourth or fifth largest contributor to UN peacekeeping missions in troop numbers, with over 5 000 involved, it reduced this to around 3 000 troops in 2015. Nigeria's military was less efficient at home, especially in defeating the Boko Haram insurgency in the north, which necessitated military involvement of neighbouring countries. Nigeria's military suffers many [shortcomings](#): low operational readiness, lack of training, poor service conditions, lack of equipment maintenance (with few aircraft or ships operational), all worsened by endemic corruption. It also appears unable to operate with due respect for human rights, as recently [denounced](#) by Amnesty International.

The terrorist threat posed by Boko Haram

According to the Global Terrorism Index, Nigeria was [third](#) in countries in the world affected by terrorism in 2015. The largest terrorist group is [Boko Haram](#). Created in 2002 and promoting a radical Islam, it began a brutal insurgency in 2009 in Nigeria's north-east, where it disrupted social life and economic activities and displaced over 1 million people. In March 2015, the group pledged allegiance to ISIL/Da'esh (the 'Islamic State' group). In 2014, at the peak of its expansion, it controlled vast territories, but since the beginning of 2015, Nigeria's army, acting in [cooperation](#) with the militaries of neighbouring countries also affected by the group's terrorist activities, managed to recapture territory and push the group

back underground. Boko Haram has however countered with [asymmetric military tactics](#), continuing its attacks on villages and in 2015 significantly increasing its campaign of suicide bombings, perpetrated in some cases by constrained minors. The Nigeria Security Tracker [database](#) lists around 78 such reported attacks with victims in 2015, compared to only 26 in 2014. Busy markets and bus stations, mosques and churches, or the security forces, were targeted, causing dozens of victims in many cases. Despite claims by the



government that the group has largely been defeated, many displaced persons are still [reluctant](#) to return home.

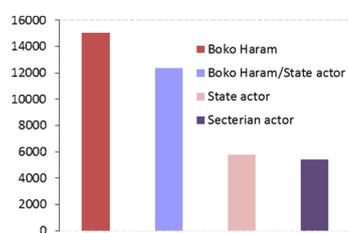
In its April 2015 [Resolution](#) on the situation in Nigeria, the European Parliament condemned the violence perpetrated by Boko Haram and asked newly elected President Buhari to dedicate resources to bringing an end to the insurgency. The EU provides [humanitarian assistance](#) to victims of violence, especially those displaced by Boko Haram, and [support](#) for strengthening Nigeria's capacity to respond to security challenges, e.g. by training its armed forces to respect human rights.

Other security threats

Niger Delta rebellion. Over the past decade, a [new generation](#) of Niger Delta militants has threatened war against the government. The March 2015 presidential defeat of Goodluck Jonathan, who originates from the Delta, has fuelled renewed claims for greater autonomy. This oil-rich region has suffered constant turmoil, with long-accumulated local grievances as the population has profited little from the oil boon, whilst the environment has suffered massively because of oil exploration. Militant acts and criminal activity are often interlinked, including oil theft, illegal refining, kidnapping of oil company employees for ransom and for pressing local demands, sabotage of oil installations for political purposes, as well as attacks against security forces. At its peak in 2009, the insurgency [claimed](#) an estimated 1 000 lives a year, and cut Nigeria's oil output by over 50%. The amnesty negotiated for the rebels in 2009 managed to return the region to relative peace; however, facing [fear](#) of renewed violence early in 2016, the government [decided](#) to continue the associated programme for retraining former rebels originally scheduled to end in 2015.

New [upsurge](#) in Biafran separatism. Several groups, acting mainly in five states inhabited by the Igbo ethnic group in the south-east, claim independence for Biafra, a short-lived republic which unilaterally declared independence in 1967 and was suppressed in 1970 by Nigeria's federal army. The October 2015 arrest of a separatist leader advocating violent action triggered a month-long demonstration, culminating in violence on 2 December 2015. However, popular support for further violent action remains slight.

Violent deaths by perpetrator
Data presented compiled based on mass-media reports.



Source: [CFR](#); May 2011-December 2015

Ethno-religious and communal conflict. Although less publicised than the Boko Haram insurgency, with which it has certain [connections](#) and shares many similarities, the attacks perpetrated by [Fulani nomads](#) against farming communities in the Middle Belt region grew in intensity from 2011, reaching a peak in 2014. According to data from [Nigeria Watch](#) based on press reports, between 2011 and 2015 around 3 300 persons were killed in events involving Fulani herdsmen; five attacks causing more than 100 deaths each. The pattern of violence usually consists of attacks by well-armed Fulani herdsmen on villages, often at night, leading to indiscriminate murder of civilians, rape and sometimes kidnapping, and in reprisals by villagers. This conflict has multiple causes, making it [difficult to distinguish](#) a main driver: scarcity of land and shrinking grazing corridors as a result of rapid population growth; climate change ([encroaching desert](#) in the north); [ethno-religious enmity](#) among Muslim pastoralists and,

usually Christian, farmers; criminality; and acquiescence by local politicians who may take advantage of the situation. The federal and state government response has been [absent](#) or ineffective. Ethnic and religious cleavages in cities also fuel frequent outbursts of violence. The recent [violent clash](#) between the military and a [Shia Islamic movement](#) risks a further sectarian conflict.

Electoral violence. Violence has often accompanied elections in Nigeria, at federal, state and local level. Although the March 2015 presidential elections were celebrated as peaceful, acts of violence leading to fatalities took place during the campaign. According to [Nigeria Watch](#), 428 persons lost their life in connection with the 2007 general elections, a further 912 in the context of the 2011 general elections, while in 2015 the total number of fatalities was lower at 370, resulting mainly from political group actions.

Piracy and maritime insecurity in the Gulf of Guinea. Related to oil extraction activities, with a large share of attacks [targeting](#) vessels carrying petroleum products, piracy is encouraged by the booming black market for fuel in West Africa. Piracy is regarded as a [growing threat](#), but based on the available data it is [difficult](#) to infer a growing trend in pirate attacks. Despite the increased presence of the Nigerian Navy, [attacks](#) continue, sometimes involving kidnapping of crew members for ransom.

See also complementary EPRS notes on the [human rights](#), [political](#), [economic](#) and [social](#) situation in Nigeria.