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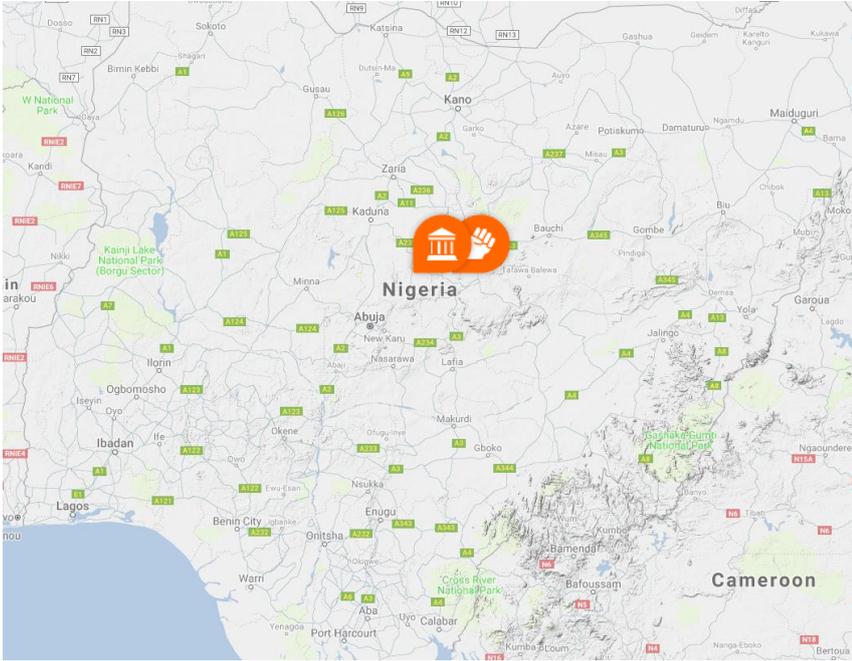
LATEST

TRAVEL ADVISORY



ELECTION FORECAST • JANUARY 2019

NIGERIAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION



KEY EVENTS

 **NIGERIA: HIGH** travel risk

 Risk of Unrest: **HIGH**

 Political Risk: **HIGH**

Urban Centres: Anticipate heightened security, avoid all political gatherings as campaigning continues ahead of 16 February Presidential Election

NIGERIA: COUNTRYWIDE (HIGH) 

KEY POINTS

- Nigeria will contest its presidential election on 16 February. Historically, election periods have proved triggers for widespread unrest leading to clashes with security forces. Campaigning for the election began on 18 November.
- Current incumbent and leader of the All Progressives Congress party (APC), Muhammadu Buhari will run for his second term, four years after winning a landmark victory and becoming the first opposition candidate to defeat a sitting president.
- Widespread unrest is expected in the coming weeks leading to localised clashes between political supporters and security forces. Travellers in Nigeria should liaise with local contacts and avoid all political gatherings due to the risk of violence.

SITUATION SUMMARY

There are currently twenty-five candidates registered to contest the presidential election on 16 February, in what will be a single-vote, straight run-off for the Nigerian presidency. Current incumbent and leader since 2015, Muhammadu Buhari, will run for re-election for the ruling APC party and has continued his strong anti-corruption stance that won him the previous election. His main competition is likely to come from former vice President and leader of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), Atiku Abubakar. The PDP, who won every Presidential election between 1999 and 2011, continue to garner strong support which has grown in recent months as Buhari has failed to deliver on his election promises from 2015. Both Buhari and Abubakar are considered the main frontrunners following the failure of opposition parties to choose a unity candidate to challenge the two biggest political parties in Nigeria.

Elections in the country have historically been marred by violent demonstrations and clashes between political protesters and security forces. In the 2015 election, 22 of the 36 Nigerian states experienced sustained pre-election related violence leading to 56 deaths and hundreds of arrests. Further, the security forces preoccupation with issues related to the election has allowed Islamist groups in the restive northeast region to launch multiple attacks aimed at targeting the democratic process in the country. The jihadist group Boko Haram will seek to exploit further weaken the 2019 election cycle in response to what they feel is an illegitimate poll. Further security concerns come as a result of a rise of ethno-religious, farmer-pastoralist, violence that has swept across Nigeria in 2018; which could be a source of further instability over the election period.



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Travellers should stay up to date with the latest information, especially regarding political demonstrations. Consult local media, in country contacts and Solace Secure alerts for details of any planned or ongoing demonstrations in your area. Travel Risk Managers should review escalation and evacuation plans to ensure they are up to date, realistic and can be implemented at short notice. Consider strategies to rapidly assemble staff in a central and secure location in the event there is a substantial deterioration in the security environment.

SOLACE GLOBAL COMMENT

Nigeria is a hugely diverse and complex country. The 36 states that make up its huge landmass are split across tribal, ethnic and religious lines, contributing to the deep divisions felt within the collected civil society. Longstanding political issues are often violently contested between opposing groups with election periods proving a catalyst for periods of such violence. Politics has been fraught with nepotism and while the country continues to have vast reserves of natural resource wealth, poverty is rife. Oxfam ranked Nigeria as the country with the highest inequality between rich and poor for the second successive year in 2018 highlighting that social spending on health, education and social protection remains severely low in comparison to gross domestic profit which is reflected in poor human development indicators countrywide. While the 2015 election saw the first major transition of power to an opposition group, the political elite have continued to fail to meet the expectations of the Nigerian people, further cementing the divisions within society rather than moving towards a more unified country.

Violence erupted in Nigeria's northern states after the 2011 election when Muslim communities protested following the re-election of southern-born Christian, Goodluck Jonathon. The protests turned into riots targeting Christian communities who were alleged to have voted for the then President. In response Christian communities retaliated targeting mosques, business and homes belonging to Muslims families. Over 800 people were killed in the days following the announcement of the results highlighting the tense and sectarian divisions that still exists throughout today.

The 2015 presidential election was considered ground-breaking and a huge cause for celebration after Nigerians voted to defeat a sitting President for the first time in the country's history and remove the People's Democratic Party (PDP). Buhari's campaign was built on the promise of improving the opportunities and living conditions of all Nigerians, with a focus on livelihoods, education, improved security and reduced corruption. However, the Presidents tenure has seen limited results and Nigerians remain disillusioned at the failure of the All Progressives Congress (APC) party to fulfil promises made during the election. Youth unemployment has risen to 33% during Buhari's tenure, leading to increased levels of crime as well as a surge in the recruitment of young men into militant groups. In July 2018, leaders of both political houses defected from APC to the PDP party and proceeded to block legislation and delay funding – making it increasingly difficult for the ADP to impose reforms. In part, this can be attributed to the conscious effort from the old-school ruling elite to disrupt and counter policies proposed by the government which has led to fractures and defections within the ruling party. The current incumbent, Buhari, has also been accused by the PDP of mounting a 'political witch-hunt' as the President seeks convictions for the previous governments alleged corruption.

While no polls exist in Nigeria – making it difficult to accurately assess current voting intentions – local studies would suggest that there is currently a sharp divide between the two main parties. The majority of Buhari's supporters believe that he can still instigate change; however, over the last year support for the PDP and their candidate, Abubakar, has grown following a strong campaign suggesting that the President has failed to deliver on the 2015 promises. Buhari who is 75, is widely considered to lack the political savvy, energy or creativity to implement the critical changes identified in his campaign. The main opponent, Atiku Abubakar, is seen as a kleptocrat who will quickly implement the return of nepotistic policies that seek to enrich the ruling class and avoid tackling the wider political challenges. While the election will be fiercely contested, neither candidate will be able to introduce the reforms needed for sustainable change.

Both main parties are approaching the election with an aggressive political mindset using divisive rhetoric to bolster their campaigns. Driven by the huge financial rewards of holding the office, elections are likely to be marred by vote buying or voter inducement, dissemination of fake news, hate speech and acts of violence. Such tactics are likely to provoke disruptive demonstrations and political rallies that lead to clashes between rival protesters as well as with security forces.

The complex security dynamics that are currently plaguing Nigeria will mean that the security forces remain overstretched throughout the election period. The Boko Haram militancy will likely respond to any reassignment of Nigerian military units to election flashpoints by launching attacks in



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order to retake strategic towns once held by the militant group in Borno state in the north east of the country. One branch of the Boko Haram militancy, the Islamic State of West Africa, have already launched a series of attacks in recent week vying to achieve territorial gain.

A resurgence of pastoralist-farmer violence in the north-central zones of the country will fuel further instability during the election period. In the first six months of 2018 violence between the two groups, claimed 1300 lives. A rise in tensions has been brought on by the increasing environmental degradation being experienced in the northern grazing lands which has prompted herders to encroach on farming areas in the Middle-Belt. The governments slow response to the steadily growing crisis has encouraged the formation of militias on both sides in order to protect livelihoods, leading to violent confrontation. With pastoralist-farmers occupying almost 15 percent of the vote - politicians are already exploiting the existing friction, promising reforms and inducements to differing groups for their vote. The Middle-Belt and some north eastern regions, particularly Benue, Plateau, Adamawa, Nasarawa and Taraba states, all present potential flashpoints for violence during the election period.

Growing animosity between the government and Nigeria's Shia Muslim community could be further aggravated through the election period. While the majority of Nigerians are Sunni Muslims, three million Shia Muslims dominate neighbourhoods in Abuja and the northern states of Kano and Sokoto. The Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) have been accused by President Buhari of attempting to create a state within a state – with their own legal and welfare systems - angering many within the Nigerian government. In 2015 protests by Shia communities in Kano and Sokoto states as well as several neighbourhoods in Abuja resulted in security forces killing hundreds of unarmed protesters and the arrest of IMN leader Ibrahim Zakzary. On 30 October IMN supporters protested in the streets of Abuja calling for the release of their leader. Security forces responded to the unrest by firing live ammunition at protesters, killing 46 and leading to the arrest of 400. IMN is expected use the campaigning period to launch further anti-government demonstrations in Abuja, potentially provoking a forceful reaction to security forces.

The complex web of ethnic, social and political challenges has brought the election into the spotlight. The tense environment in which polling will take place could trigger a severe deterioration in the security environment and all travel to Nigeria should be supported by clear risk mitigation strategies that cover multiple escalation scenerios. Travellers should be fully briefed of the security environment prior to travel.

SECURITY ADVICE

HIGH POLITICAL RISK



- Consider minimising movement on, and immediately after, the 16 February, due to the credible threat posed by clashes between demonstrators and security forces.
- Travellers should avoid all election-related gatherings due to the risk of violence. Consult local media, in country contacts and Solace Global Alerts for details of any planned or ongoing demonstrations in your area.
- Anticipate heightened security at public venues, at rally locations and in the vicinity of election-related venues. Exercise vigilance around protest areas and polling stations; follow all official directives.
- Consider implementing additional communication strategies should widespread unrest lead to the suspension of telephone and internet services. Make sure you have a clear process that can quickly account for all staff in country.
- Review your travel risk management policies for the Nigeria and update any existing escalation or evacuation plans prior to the election, considering strategies for quick movement of people out of the country and a secure stand fast location if evacuation is not possible.



Solace Global remains available to provide the full range of Travel Risk Management services to clients. Solace Global is also able to provide comprehensive crisis management, in-country journey management, tracking, response, and evacuation services.

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